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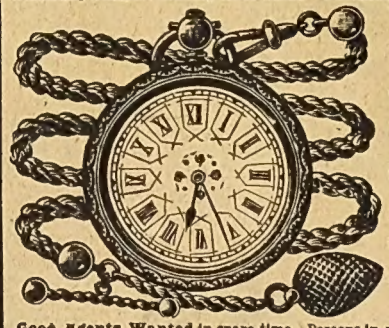

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Short Stories

No. 709. ONE PENNY.

For the Week Ending August 2nd, 1902.

THE DARK HORSE.

Cinderella's Triumph Over Her Gay Sisters.

GERALDINE, Evelyn, and Sybil Manners had begun the race of life together at the respective ages of two, one, and nought years, and as no son had come to inherit their father's estate, it passed to a cousin by entail, leaving the girls but moderately dowered.

Their mother had, however, a life interest in the house, and a handsome jointure, so that their father's death made little change in their material welfare for the time being.

Evelyn and Sybil were frivolous, fair-headed flirts, but Geraldine was cast in a different mould. Having waited for Evelyn to be eighteen before "coming out," she had only had a year of country gaiety when Sybil was declared fit also for conquest, and burning for the fray. As their mother always insisted that only two of her girls should go to any entertainment, Geraldine began gradually to give place to her younger and more selfish sisters, until after a time it came to be an accepted fact that they should represent the social side of the family, while Geraldine stayed at home uncomplainingly and amused herself reading, fishing, or riding as the seasons alternated.

And now she was thirty! That aftermath of youth where a woman's chance of matrimony wanes with each succeeding year. Geraldine had never wished to be married as her sisters had done, but what woman is there who would prefer a single life if (oh, such a great big "if" sometimes) she could meet the right man.

Looking back over her life now she acknowledged she had made a mistake. She had missed most of the fun of life and had gained a little by the sacrifice. She had begun life with ideals which were too high ever to be realised. She saw men suffered little, if anything, from the countless enslavements of a coquette and that her sisters' admirers never went and drowned themselves when displaced in favour of some fresh lover. In fact, from her observation it seemed that the men usually got tired first of the wild game with the proverbial fire.

No one realised better than the eldest Miss Manners the exact position she held in the opinion of the surrounding county. A good bit of a recluse, a little bit of an oddity, and oh, horror of horrors to all the male sex—rather a "blue stocking." Others had implied, if not actually stated, that these were the reasons which satisfactorily accounted for her absence from the gaieties of the neighbourhood, and she had not taken the trouble to remove the impression. It would have been entirely against her wishes to pose as a Cinderella, even a most willing one, as she undoubtedly was; if she could with truth be called one at all, when it was only of late it had dawned upon her that the sunshine of life was not brightest in the solitudes.

Every year, during the height of the London season, one of the girls was invited for a month's visit to the house of a rich but childless uncle and aunt, who moved in the smartest of sets. Evelyn and Sybil had always been the ones to go year by year, and it was no small annoyance to their mother's sister, that, with all her efforts, combined with their pretty faces, no eligible suitor had come forward to lead them to the altar, though dozens of men worshipped at their shrines year by year. Their uncle used slyly to hint that the young men found safety in numbers, but their aunt still fondly hoped that one would come "forth from the many," and make the longed for request.

When, however, they had reached the ages of twenty-eight and nine, and their aunt's invitation arrived as usual, a difficulty arose. It had been arranged earlier that Evelyn should be the one to accept it that year, and this being the case Sybil had chosen to retire into private life for a bit in order to do a picturesque homage to the memory of a last season's lover who had been killed in South Africa. Just before the invitation arrived Evelyn had sprained her ankle and was unable to stir off the sofa, so when Mrs. Manners read out her sister's letter with a query as to what answer she should make, silence was her response.

There is no doubt that the memory of the South African hero would have been honoured at a more convenient season by the fair Sybil had not Geraldine remarked quietly, "I should like to go, mother."

Mrs. Manners looked up in astonishment at her eldest daughter, and Sybil broke out into an unpleasant laugh, saying, "Fancy Geraldine in London!"

This seemed at once to decide her mother, who, smiling at her eldest girl, said gently, "Very well, dear, I shall write and accept for you."

But Mrs. Manners was inwardly somewhat fearful as to what her fashionable sister would say to the appearance of her quiet firstborn, and she did not mention which of her daughters was to be expected until the morning of her arrival. Thus it was that as soon as Mrs. Sutledge had opened her sister's letter, she exclaimed angrily, "Well, really I don't know what Charlotte is thinking of."

"What is the matter, my dear?" inquired her husband, looking up over *The Times* and his gold rimmed glasses.

"Matter, why it is Geraldine who is to arrive here this afternoon, as the other girls cannot come. It is really too bad, and a large dinner-party this evening. What am I to do with

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a raw country girl like that? What excuse can I make to stop her coming up?"

"None, with my permission," said Mr. Sutledge. "It is the best piece of news I have heard for this long time. Egad, I shall have someone to ride with in the Park now who will not keep me in fear lest she should tumble off. She is worth a cart-load of the other misses. The best hand at tying flies I ever met, and as sensible a girl as a man need wish to talk to."

"That is just it. A man does not want sense when he talks to a woman," sighed Mrs. Sutledge.

"You mean he does not expect to find it, my dear," chuckled her husband.

"And I have Lord Beauclerc coming to-night, who wants to be taken out of himself by a woman who can show him the way," she continued, ignoring his remark. "It is really most unfortunate. Why, the last time I saw her she had her hair screwed up in a tight knot at the back."

"Ready for a canter," suggested her uncle, "I'll go surety for Gerry that she does not spoil your party," he said heartily, but his wife only mentally commented on the impossibility of making her husband realise the importance of social trivialities.

Geraldine arrived at tea-time, and her aunt was agreeably surprised to find that she passed the social ordeal of entering the room with an unostentatious dignity that bespoke her long descent, and she instinctively softened the somewhat chilly reception which she had prepared for her niece.

The girl was dressed with that excessive quietness which shows particular care and refinement of taste to the initiated, and suited her rather distinguished than pretty personality to perfection. Mr. Sutledge made his appearance in the drawing-room at tea-time, which was a most unheard of proceeding, but, fearing his wife's reception of his favourite, he had ventured into the sanctum of tea and talk. He was agreeably pleased to find his wife's brow unruffled, and his hearty welcome went a long way to make Geraldine feel that her visit was not altogether a foolish undertaking.

Mrs. Sutledge decided that she would make no change in the arrangement of her dinner party, and allow Lord Beauclerc to take his chances with her niece, and so it was that Geraldine found herself one of the dining-room procession, with her arm resting lightly upon that of a rather grave-looking man who had a sprinkling of grey hair above his temples.

"Do you know, Miss Manners?" he began with a rather sad smile, "I am afraid your aunt has intrusted you with a pupil to-night, rather than a companion. I do not know what I ought to know and talk to you about, I have been so long out of England, not to say London."

A sudden gleam of sympathy shot from Geraldine's grey eyes.

"You don't know what a relief that is to me," she said with a laugh, "I have never been in London for a season before, and it frightens me so."

"Then it was a very kind Providence that threw us together. I think it is Baden Powell who says when scouting to remember the other man is just as much afraid as you are, but I own I never expected to find the quality among the fair sex of a London drawing-room."

"But then I am even a later importation than you are, for at least you have been a few days in town, while I only can boast of a few hours."

"But how is it that you have withstood the fascinations of London while living in England, for I think your aunt said you had come up from Warwickshire?"

"Well, my younger sisters are more fond of gaiety than I am, so when my aunt asked one of us on a visit they usually came."

"It was not quite fair to leave you out of all the fun was it?"

"I think it was my own choice," she said doubtfully, "but this year I wished to see what it was all like just for once before I get too old."

It was unaffectedly said, and with a smile, but the note of underlying wistfulness was not lost upon her companion.

"You talk as if you were the age of Methuselah," he said smiling, "I thought ladies generally tried to understate rather than exaggerate their age. I always own I know little of your sex, but I am beginning to realise I know nothing at all."

They both laughed and looked into each other's eyes, and each mentally commented on what nice eyes the other had. Mrs. Sutledge from her end of the table thought that Geraldine might not be quite such a failure after all, and into her husband's eyes there crept a very bright twinkle as he read her thought.

"Our cases are very similar," said Lord Beauclerc, "for I, too, want just a peep at the gaieties before burying myself in the country, since the term of my diplomatic work in the colonies has expired. Now, supposing we compare notes at the end of your visit, since we have started exploring society with a capital 'S' at about the same time."

"Yes, willingly," said Geraldine, "but, oh, dear, it will be as bad as being a journalist! To observe for reproduction takes the charm out of life."

"That is a verywise observation; I think I was foolish to lay down my arms so quickly upon your telling me about that little white feather."

"Oh, no, please don't be afraid of me," cried Geraldine, in a voice of intreaty. "I am really not a bit clever."

"Learned, I think you mean," he corrected, bending his eyes gravely upon her.

To a person who is habitually misunderstood, to be accurately gauged is a terrifying pleasure. It was so now with Geraldine, and for a moment she was dumb, while with diplomatic instinct Lord Beauclerc addressed a remark to the lady on his other side. Turning again to her a minute later the conversation drifted into less personal channels.

"Good-night, Beauclerc," said Mr. Sutledge to his parting guest, "see you in the park to-morrow morning? Going to show my niece off. Finest horsewoman in Warwickshire. So long."

"Well, my dear," he remarked later to his wife, "you see Gerry did not disgrace you."

"No, she seemed to get on very well with our Ex-Governor, I suppose it is sometimes an advantage to a girl to be able to discuss volcanoes. Oh, I think she will do very well as her dresses are less countrified than I expected. She is a novelty too, which is something."

"Not so long in the window as her sisters, eh?"

"I am sure I have done my best for those girls," sighed Mrs. Sutledge, "I can't think why they are not married."

"Too many strings, my dear, too many strings," murmured her husband, as he wandered off to have a last cigar.

A woman either looks at her best or her worst upon horseback, and Geraldine was one of the lucky ones to whom it was an advantage, and so Lord Beauclerc thought when he greeted her and Mr. Sutledge next morning in the park.

With an almost childish delight in the novelty of the scene, and keen amusement at some of the horsewomanship displayed, she seemed as fresh and charming to the middle-aged bachelor as the still dew scented air wafted to them across the flower-beds.

"They say London without its parks would be like life without love, Miss Manners. Do you agree with the suggestion?" he asked, as Mr. Sutledge hailed an acquaintance and dropped behind.

"I think if it was possible for a life to be entirely without love of any kind its case would be far worse than a parkless city, worse, oh, far worse than the Sahara or Steppes even. But then it is like food," she said, laughing, "very much less will sustain life than people think."

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"Have you tried doing on so very little that you speak with such assurance?"

"I don't think I have ever been greedy for affection," she said, smiling, "I don't like receiving what I cannot return, and I am afraid my heart is not a very large one."

With another girl such a topic would have been sure to hit upon a vein of self-conscious awkwardness, but Geraldine's transparent seriousness and directness of remark saved it from the least touch of such a thing. It only made the man at her side lapse into silence to wonder if he had had enough affection through his life even to sustain existence in a healthy and unmorbid condition, and for the first time almost, he realised how alone he was, as his late private secretary passed him too engrossed with his *fiancée* to recognise his chief.

Thus day after day through the bright mornings at the end of May and beginning of June Lord Beauclerc sought Geraldine and her uncle in their morning rides, and it was surprising the number of acquaintances Mr. Sutledge had, whom he wanted to consult upon one important question or another. Indeed it was a matter of some flattering wonder to these worthy folk themselves, that a man, usually careless about others' opinions, and who mostly acknowledged their presence with a passing nod, should now eagerly inquire their opinions upon the topics of the day.

At the many afternoon and evening entertainments to which Geraldine accompanied her aunt, Lord Beauclerc seldom sought her, and never singled her out from other acquaintances, but in the park he seemed to resent any trespass upon her attention.

Geraldine's introduction to Society had been neither a grand triumph nor a signal failure, but on the whole her aunt was not ill-pleased with her visit. If young men did not struggle to supply her with a cup of tea, the dowagers inquired who was the distinguished-looking girl she was chaperoning, and whoever spoke to her lingered beside her unbored, even if they did not eagerly seek her again. She pleased all, but she lacked that charm which prostrates all hearts at the conqueror's feet.

Geraldine realised all this with her usual quick perception, and she felt deeply grateful to Lord Beauclerc that even during their morning rides he seemed to seek her company. This much she readily owned to herself, but she was rather surprised to find that the day before she left town she should actually jump out of bed before she was called to see if the day promised to be fine. Yes, fortune was not going to be unkind this time.

"I wonder why I did that?" mentally queried the girl. "I suppose I am rather sorry to leave town after all. Ah, London has just the charm I lack," she laughed as she covered herself up again, "it makes people want to see more of it."

Lord Beauclerc was waiting for them at the gate, and the trio passed into the park together.

They had not proceeded far when Mr. Sutledge reined in his horse with an exclamation of annoyance.

"Well, really," he said, "I don't know what has come to my memory of late. My agent may call this morning and I forgot all about him. Geraldine's last ride too. Well, it is provoking."

"If I may offer—if you will allow me to escort your niece, I shall be only too happy," said Lord Beauclerc, just a trifle too eagerly for an ordinary civility.

"That is really most good of you, Beauclerc," said Mr. Sutledge blandly, "I am sure Gerry will be grateful," and without waiting for her murmured consent, he wheeled his horse and proceeded very leisurely towards home.

"Well, when an honest man turns thief he has wonderful opportunities," he soliloquised, "why if Susan had attempted a move like that she would have been suspected at once," and those who met him wondered what was amusing the old gentleman so mightily.

Meanwhile the two unsuspecting equestrians had also slackened their pace in the opposite direction. Lord Beauclerc drew his horse close to hers.

"I think when you first came to town we agreed to compare notes as to our impressions at the close of your visit," he said gently. "But perhaps you have forgotten?"

No, she had not forgotten.

"Are you glad to leave, and sorry that you came?"

"Oh, no, I am not sorry I came," she said quickly. "I will appreciate the peace of the country far more after the hurly-burly of town. To value anything to the full one must test what life is without it for a time."

"Then you are glad to go home?" he asked very gravely.

Glad? She looked away over the broad stretch of green bordered by flaming beds in the distance, but she saw them not. It is well for a woman when she realises her heart's surrender in the solitude of her own room and not in the presence of its captor.

"Miss Manners, you are sorry to leave?" he asked again, almost sternly.

"Yes," she replied, in a low voice, still looking away from him over the park.

"Is this the comparing of notes you promised me?" he asked more lightly.

"Oh, I cannot tell you what my impressions have been," she said, looking up at him in distress, "I will have to think them out by myself."

"Well, I can tell you mine," he said, "and then perhaps you will know if you agree with me. I have realised that not only London society, but the whole world is an intensely lonely place, unless you can claim absolute possession of one heart, and although we may do with a small portion of love and not die, to live our lives to the full we must love to our utmost and receive the same in return."

She bent her head over the reins."

"Geraldine," he whispered softly, "will you give me that love, so that neither of us shall miss the best of life."

"I think I have given it to you," she said in a low tone, "at least I am afraid you came and stole it unawares."

He gave a bright happy laugh. How much younger he looked all in a minute. Youth which has not been spent lies dormant.

"Dearest," he said, "you have made me the happiest man on earth, and although we both love the country we must come up to London sometimes just to see how well off we are with our rural peace."

When Lord Beauclerc entered Mr. Sutledge's study a few hours later, that worthy man was standing with his back to the ferns in the grate, with no agent present, and a very comical twinkle in his eye.

"Want to see me about a horse, I suppose," he commented, as his lordship entered.

"I have come to ask for your consent to my marriage with your niece," Lord Beauclerc said simply, "she has been gracious enough to consent to be my wife."

"Then you might have saved yourself the trouble," said Mr. Sutledge, laughing, "for had I not approved I should not have had that lapse of memory re the agent."

Both men looked into each other's face, laughed, and shook hands.

"Nothing could please me more," continued the old man, "I always said Gerry would prove the dark horse in the sisters' race."

Peers Hervey.

If you want to make sure your advice will be taken, have it engraved on your umbrella handle.

The eye of a little miss was attracted by the sparkle of the dew at early morning. "Mamma," she exclaimed; "it's hotter'n I thought it was." "What do you mean?" "Look here; the grass is all covered with perspiration."

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SAVED FROM HERSELF.

By R. NORMAN SILVER.

A Powerful Narrative in Two Parts.

FIRST PART OF THE STORY.

VICTOR ASHFORD, a member of an aristocratic family, has married Irene Bellasis secretly, and, unknown to her, in a manner unrecognised as binding by English law. Shortly after his marriage, however, he deserts his girl wife and becomes engaged to Miss Audrey Dacre, whose father's estate joins that of the Ashford family. Indignant and mortified by the wickedness of Victor Ashford's plot, Gwendoline Bellasis, Irene's sister, determines to endeavour to make the recreant legalise his first marriage. With this object she visits him but without success. Gwendoline swears she will stop the marriage, and leaves the house.

Ashford, however, follows her, and tries to force her to accept compensation in the shape of a handsome allowance. She, however, of course refuses, whereupon Ashford, becomes insulting. He is checked by the arrival of a stranger who promises to thrash him if he doesn't clear off. Ashford doesn't wait for the fulfilment of the threat.

Gwendoline next visits Sir John Dacre at his country seat, and tells her story to him without success. Leaving the house she sits down by the roadside and sobs as though her heart would break. Just then the stranger, who previously had intervened between herself and Ashford, approaches and offers further assistance if it is in his power. Gwendoline thanks him, and upon his asking to be allowed to see her again, tells her to be in the village church on the following Sunday morning.

The stranger, a Colonial, returns to the village inn where he is staying. Later on in the day, while passing the open door of one of the bedrooms, he glances in and sees Gwendoline loading a small, shining revolver.

"You May Leave Him to Me."

"MISS GWENDOLINE BELLASIS, sir, that's the name, least ways, I suppose it's 'Miss,' but Gwendoline Bellasis was what she wrote in the visitors' book when she came, and she'd no wedding-ring on."

"Gwendoline Bellasis," murmured Philip Ross; "ah, thank you." And he began thoughtfully to stir the second cup of coffee brought him by the little waitress at the Ashford Hotel. The latter surveyed him with profound interest as she removed the plate that had borne the savoury portion of the young Colonial's morning meal, and drew up the toast-rack and the old-fashioned glass butter-cooler.

"Is—is it the lady you fancied it was?" she queried, daringly. Philip Ross started—he had forgotten the subterfuge under cover of which he had sought to question his attendant with regard to the heroine of his two odd adventures.

"Y-yes," he stammered, and added, more collectedly, "I—I must get you to take her my card and ask her to grant me a few moments' interview about a rather urgent matter."

"I'll do that," responded the waitress with alacrity, for the Colonial's embarrassment suggested a romance, and romance is dear to every daughter of Eve, "as soon as Miss Bellasis gets back. She had her breakfast very early and went out at once; she may have been going to the Park, Dacre Park, that is—she was there yesterday, for she inquired the road to it. I wondered at first if she had come down for the wedding—Mr. Ashford's, sir, with Miss Dacre."

Philip Ross assented, but showed no disposition to pursue the conversation, and the waitress, with a sigh of disappointment, retreated, leaving him alone at the table by the window.

Leaning on the sill of the open lattice, he lighted one of his inevitable cigarettes. Everything about him was singularly peaceful—the bells from the neighbouring church floated to him over fields of ripening clover and the birds called drowsily to one another through the still heat of the quiet Sunday morning. But in the mind of the Colonial was anxiety and indecision.

To begin with, he had lain awake so long the previous evening, pondering uncertainly the problem that had so suddenly confronted him, that he had slept, haunted by terrifying dreams, far into the pleasant afternoon, instead of rising, as he had projected, and waylaying his mysterious acquaintance. For some hours of the night before, he had considered the wisdom of requesting to see her and begging her to confide in him. The vision that he had had through the door, unexpectedly left ajar, of Gwendoline Bellasis loading a miniature revolver, had kindled in his heart the gravest fears and suspicions.

Yet he guessed that she meant no harm to herself—in any case, no immediate harm; had she not promised that he should see her at the parish church in the morning? If, then, he kept her under observation from the time that she rose the following morning, he should be able to prevent any untoward event and perhaps, without scandal, to reason her out of any folly she might be meditating.

So he had decided, feeling instinctively that there was some tragedy behind her despair of the preceding afternoon and her subsequent preparation of the deadly weapon. The unknown persecutor from whom he had delivered her in London on their first meeting, seemed to him to be a link in some fatal chain. But he had perceived Gwendoline Bellasis to be both a lady and a good woman, and the impression she had made upon the hitherto fancy-free Australian was no transient one. Unluckily, his plan had been shattered by a trick of Morpheus, the slumber-god, and now he sat over his breakfast, wondering what he should do under the circumstances.

At length, warned by the stoppage of the pealing bells and the sharp clanging of a single clapper, that the hour for the morning service had arrived—the service at which he was again to encounter the remarkable person who formed the subject of his reverie—he rose, went for his hat, and strolled out into the High Street of the small country town.

Many a pretty Somersetshire lass, hastening to church in her holiday garments, paused to gaze at the handsome, sunburnt stranger, with his long, free stride and friendly bearing,

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and to compare him with the sturdy, yet slouching youths of the locality.

Stared at no less interestedly by the male than by the female members of a somewhat sparse congregation, Philip Ross walked down the simple nave of St. Bennet's. He had detected in an instant the presence of Gwendoline Bellasis, and moved unconcernedly to a position where he could observe her at his leisure.

She was grave and pale, but even more lovely in her still calm, with the yellow morning sunbeams streaming down upon her, than she had been in either of the three moods—anger, alarm, despair—in which he had previously seen her. The contrast between herself and the red-cheeked, rustic beauties about her lent to Gwen an almost ethereal delicacy and charm. The Colonial plunged deeper and deeper into love as he gazed at her. For a moment he had forgotten the problem represented by the loaded revolver.

Already the familiar English service had begun, and Philip Ross, prompted by an offered share of a prayer-book, joined in the responses, with, it must be confessed, some degree of absent-mindedness. But though his glance wandered continually to Gwen's set, white face, she did not betray, by look or gesture, that she had observed his entrance.

A startling idea sprang up in the Colonial's brain. What if Gwendoline Bellasis had come armed to St. Bennet's, with the intention of avenging, in that sacred edifice and by a sudden shot, some real or fancied injury? He scanned the congregation; but there appeared to be no one in the church, excepting possibly the rector or his assisting curate, against whom a woman of her class could have a grievance. Yet he wished that he had taken the bull by the horns and demanded boldly from Gwen an explanation of what he had seen through that partially-closed door.

An abrupt motion on Gwen's part attracted his attention. She had bent forward in her seat, clinging with her gloved hands to the back of the pew before her. The rector had begun to read various notices, the old and hallowed phrase, "I publish the banns of marriage," fell upon the ears of the worshippers. He read on—"Between Audrey Margaret Dacre, of Dacre Park, in the parish of St. Bennet the Martyr, Tiversedge, and Victor Beaumont Ashford, of Ashford Court, also of this parish. If any of you know cause or just impediment why these two persons should not be joined together in holy matrimony ye are to declare it. This is the third time of asking."

Philip Ross stirred in his seat. Gwendoline Bellasis had risen and stood, pallid yet beautiful, swaying unsteadily.

"I—I——" she faltered, and stopped, struggling for self-control. A rustle of amazement ran through the congregation. Gwen put a gloved hand to her side and the Colonial felt his own heart throb with pain and anxiety. What was she going to say? Gwendoline Bellasis grew calmer, though she still trembled pitifully.

"I—I—know of an impediment," she said, "that ought to be a just one before God and man. Victor Ashford is already married to my sister."

The rustle in the church ceased; amazement had been substituted for suspense. The rector regarded perplexedly the author of this disconcerting interruption.

"Perhaps," he said hesitatingly, "you will be good enough, at the end of the service, to see me in the vestry, when you can give me particulars—of this—this allegation."

Gwen threw up her head with a proud, desperate courage. "I will not lie, even about Victor Ashford," she said; "legally, he is not married—he contrived that the ceremony with my sister should be both secret and invalid; it was all a cruel, wicked plot. He will not consent to rectify the flaw in the marriage, nor will Sir John Dacre——"

The rector raised a protesting palm. "Really," he interjected, "this is not quite the place or the time for these details—and—assertions."

"The house of God," said Gwen bravely, "is the fittest place to protest against an outrage offered to Him and to the institution of marriage. This church is to be desecrated by the wedding of Mr. Ashford and Miss Dacre. Her father, Sir John, knows the whole of the facts, and, in common with his future and fitting son-in-law, offered us money to pay for the broken heart, the ruined life, the shattered self-respect of a girl little more than a child!"

Philip Ross' pulses thrilled with a new emotion. His interest in Gwen became in a flash not only the sentimental passion of love, but the surer one of reverence and esteem. He recognised in Gwendoline Bellasis a strong yet womanly woman, courageous, high-minded, eloquent with the rare feminine eloquence that does not unsex its possessor.

A stooping figure, aged and benevolent, was moving along the nave. It was the old verger of the church, the rector had motioned to him significantly.

"My poor lass," he said gently, and in a voice that reached Gwen only, "let me get you a chair and a drink of water in the porch. You're a bit overwrought, and I've daughters of my own. Come, come, my dear, parson is a bit hasty, and I wouldn't see a lady like you up before the magistrates for brawling in church—you would but get names published and do hurt to her you've tried to serve."

Gwen turned; her blood—the hot, fearless justice-loving blood of a good woman—was up.

"Turn me out if you will," she cried, "but I swear to you all, by everything I hold sacred, that Victor Ashford shall not marry Audrey Dacre."

She stepped slowly from her pew and suffered the verger to lead her out of the church. The Australian followed, stared at more than ever.

In the porch he found the verger alone. The old man's strength and powers of persuasion had failed to arrest Gwen's flight. Philip Ross caught a glimpse of her yellow gown at the bend of the road and hastened after her, to see that Gwen left the footpath, slipped into a little wood by the wayside, and flung herself, weeping, on the grass of a tiny glade. The Australian overtook her, quickening his pace to a run. He could not be certain what desperate purpose her wounded and defeated pride might not have in view, despite the reassuring suggestiveness of her threat concerning Victor Ashford.

Once again he stooped over her, as he had done on the preceding day in the lane hard by.

"Miss Bellasis," he said, and his tones were husky with tenderness, "I beg of you, as your sincere well-wisher, if you have with you the weapon I saw you preparing last night, that you will give it to me. Such wild justice as you may be meditating is not for a woman's hand to inflict, and I dare not suppose that you would dream of injuring yourself."

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Gwen gazed at him in astonishment. "You know about that?" she sobbed; "but I—I—have not got it here. It was for to-morrow, for the wedding—if they would not hear me at the church to-day, I was going to avenge Rene somehow; this marriage will kill her."

Philip Ross raised the drooping, graceful figure; Gwen leant upon him heavily, and sought to hide her tear-stained face.

"Fate has sent me to you, Miss Bellasis," said the Colonial; "I have it in my power to amply avenge both you and your sister. Let us go back to the hotel, and either give me your revolver, or unload it and keep it yourself. As for Victor Ashford, you may leave him to me."

"Rene Must Decide."

"You're quite sure, Ashford, that it is all as you say—that there is no possible point of law by which this strong-minded creature's sister can claim you as her husband?"

Victor Ashford snipped the end of a cigar with a little gold and steel tool that hung at his watch-chain.

"Nothing short of an Act of Parliament, Sir John," he retorted, striking a vesta and holding it in the hollow of his hand, "could make us two one. I am glad you don't mind my smoking, Audrey—it *is* so soothing to the nerves."

Audrey Dacre looked out from under her parasol of sky-blue chiffon across the broad woodlands and goodly farms of Ashford Court. She stood by the old grey stone balustrade of the elevated terrace from which Ashford Court itself commanded three counties. Near her Victor Ashford lounged in a wicker deck-chair, and her father paced the gravel walk with restless strides.

"I've too much confidence in your astuteness, Victor," she observed coldly, "to share papa's anxiety. Trust you for not doing things by halves! But, though I'm quite willing to marry you and control the biggest rent-roll in Somersetshire, I don't fancy a record scandal which may finish up by putting you in the dock."

Ashford laughed.

"I've taken every precaution against that, my dear girl," he declared; "such a contingency attracts me even less than it does you. Not that a big breach of promise action might not be forced upon us, and, after what we are told happened this morning at St. Bennet's, we must realise that Gwendoline Bellasis is prepared to go to a pretty good length in order to avenge herself, and—ahem!—the little lady with whom I was once so absurdly fascinated."

Sir John Dacre bit his finger nails. "I would not have had the scene at the church happen for worlds," he exclaimed; "law and lawyers, newspaper reports and that sort of scandal, don't greatly affect us—it all seems, even to society and in London, very far off and dim. But here, among our own people and under the very noses of a gaping Liversedge congregation!—that is a different thing."

He stopped abruptly. A servant had glided up to them, a tall, grave, supple footman in a handsome livery, and bearing a gleaming salver.

"This gentleman to see you, sir," he said to Victor Ashford; "I was to say that Mr. Ross had only been in England a short time, and may be leaving at an early date—he would be obliged, sir, if you would give him a few moments."

"Philip Ross," read his master irritably from the offered card. "I don't know the fellow—what is he like?"

"Quite the gentleman, sir," replied the servant, with the unhesitating decision of his class upon the point in question; "there is a lady with him: they are in the terrace drawing-room, sir, the library was occupied."

The other frowned. Ashford Court held a party of wedding-guests, and it irritated its owner to be reminded of the ceremony now so imminent.

"Very well," he said; "I will see him. Pray pardon me, Sir John; forgive me, Audrey; some importunate folk from abroad—I won't be long."

He crossed the terrace and entered the indicated apartment. The Australian came towards him, measuring his involuntary host with a rapid scrutiny.

"Pleased to meet you, Mr.—er—Ross," remarked Victor Ashford, civilly enough, and waited for his visitor to introduce the feminine figure that, veiled and cloaked, sat in a shadowy corner of the room. At his pause he rose, threw back the cloak, lifted the veil, and he beheld—Gwendoline Bellasis.

"A clever trick!" he sneered; "so it is you, Miss Bellasis; and who, if you please, may be Mr. Philip Ross, the gentleman from abroad?"

The Colonial answered quickly. "A friend of Miss Bellasis," he responded; "who thinks that she needs, at this juncture, some slight masculine support. I presume that by now you will have heard of the protest Miss Bellasis felt it her duty to make at St. Bennet's this morning."

"I have," said Victor Ashford, harshly, "and my answer to it will be found in the presence here this afternoon of Sir John and Miss Dacre. With your permission, my young Don Quixote, I will call them in. They may be able to convince you that, whatever happens, Miss Dacre and I intend to be duly married to-morrow."

He gained the window, went through, and retraced his steps across the terrace. A moment later he returned. Audrey Dacre and her father accompanied him.

"Mr. Philip Ross, Audrey," he said, "Mr. Ross, Miss Dacre; Mr. Ross, Sir John Dacre—Mr. Ross, Sir John, is an amateur Quixote and squire of distressed damsels. As for Miss Bellasis, you have met before. I have been telling Miss Bellasis and Mr. Ross, Audrey, that we intend, at all costs, to be married in the morning, despite the highly indecorous disturbance of to-day. May I trouble you and Sir John to confirm that?"

Sir John Dacre bent his head assentingly, and Audrey Dacre yawned. "Why will you people not consult your solicitors?" she observed, wearily; "it would make matters so much—more decent. These vulgar arguments and recriminations are most disagreeable."

The Colonial ignored her interruption. "Mr. Ashford," he remarked, "I desire on behalf of Miss Bellasis, to address a final appeal to you. For the last time, will you repair the treachery you have been guilty of towards your young and innocent wife—for Irene Bellasis is by right Irene Ashford, and you know it. She loves you even yet, will you not play a man's part and make her happy?"

Victor Ashford turned his back. "Oh, spare me any cant," he requested; "it's bad enough on a woman's lips, on a man's it is too utterly sickening."

Philip Ross drew himself up. "Very well," he declared, "I see that you are hopeless. Reformation being out of the question, the necessity for punishment remains. Victor Ashford, you are no longer master of Ashford Court, you are not fit for the place and power it gives. I take it from you."

A sudden pallor alarmed bleached Victor Ashford's face. "Fool!" he exclaimed, "what foolery is this?"

The Australian produced a legal-looking document, with a photograph fastened to it by seals. "Here is an affidavit of identification," he explained, "sworn by the best firm of solicitors in Brisbane. I am not Philip Ross, but Philip Ashford, son of that Robert Ashford who was your uncle's unloved elder son. Under the entail, however, I claim to inherit—you are little better than a beggar."

Ashford recoiled. Gwen was gazing, astounded, at the Colonial. "So this was your secret," she said, "and I—I never dreamt of it!"

"How should you?" asked Philip Ashford, smiling, "you

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knew nothing of the family history of the Ashfords, or the story of a painful feud between son and father."

Audrey Dacre interrupted them with a strange, almost hysterical cry.

"Victor a beggar!" she ejaculated; "an excellent judge of a matrimonial bargain you are, papa. Let us get out of this and countermand those idiotic wedding preparations. Fancy Audrey Dacre married to a pauper—what an escape!"

Her father contemplated Victor Ashford incredulously. "Ashford," he gasped, "you—you—surely this can't be true! You would not have deceived me so shamefully."

"It is perfectly true," said the Colonial, "though in that respect you cannot reasonably blame my unlucky cousin. My father was understood to have been killed in a railway accident in New South Wales. He preferred to be thought so and took the name of the man who really perished, a certain Ross. He grew rich, very rich, and left me all he had, Ashford Court and rent roll were no temptation to me. Had the old home been in worthy hands, I should have allowed it to remain there and gone back again. I would even have permitted this scoundrel to retain it if he would but have done justice to his unhappy wife. I gave him a last chance, he flung it away. Mr. Ashford, my lawyers will communicate with you at the earliest possible moment, Sir John, Miss Dacre, I have the honour to bid you good day."

Victor Ashford had been silent, lost in unabashed reflection.

"One moment—ahem!—cousin Philip," he rejoined, "can we not come to terms? Miss Dacre has thrown me over, and I cannot but rejoice that I have escaped an alliance with so mercenary a bride. What dowry will you give with my—my—well, let us say my temporarily-disowned wife?"

Gwen sprang in between the cousins. "Mr. Ross," she cried, using the name by which she had first known him, "you shall not answer, I would rather see Rene dead than she should pass into his power. He is monstrous, inhuman; she shall not tie herself irrevocably to him."

The Australian put her hand on his arm. "Your sister must decide for herself," he declared, gravely; "Mr. Ashford, in any case, you will hear from me at an early date. For the present, farewell."

* * * * *

Gwen, after much deliberation and intreaty, had her way. Irene did not return to Victor Ashford's roof. Yet they saw one another again, and face to face, when, in a London registry office, the flaw that had been so cunningly contrived in their marriage was rectified by a second one. Nor did any one but Victor Ashford and his returned cousin know the consideration that was paid for the formal agreement that at once provided for the righting of Irene Ashford and her husband's perpetual separation from her.

It was not Ashford Court, that is certain, though there are Ashford's there still, including some little and extremely important ones, two small boys and a girl, the latter Irene, in honour of her "pretty auntie."

Two years after Gwendoline Bellasis married her Australian lover, there came news from abroad—from South America—that clothed the elder Irene in formal black and made her sister hang about her for weeks with anxious tenderness.

"Do you ever wish—you—you had gone back to him?" whispered Gwen once, clasping the golden head to her bosom.

Irene sighed. "At—at first, a little," was her murmured answer, "till I helped to nurse your babies and—and then I was glad."

Gwen kissed her. "Ah, well, dear," she said, twisting the luckless wedding-ring on her sister's hand. "Perhaps you may one day take this off and put one of better omen in its place."

"Not I," retorted Irene, blushing.

But she did, and Gwen wept tears of joy over a gay little wedding at which the sunshine was as golden as the bride's locks, and her two boys carried a white satin train down the nave of St. Bennet's after their beloved "Auntie."

Irene had insisted on St. Bennet's as the scene of her second marriage. "Here you were shamed, dear," she said when it was all over, "and here you have been vindicated."

THE END.

IS YOUR BIRTHDAY THIS WEEK?

We have just secured the services of a well-known astrologer, and below will be found his prophecies for this week's birthdays.

July 29.—The year will be rather favourable for those born on this day, but many minor drawbacks may be expected. Beware of quarrels and law.

Young girls who were born in the a.m. will have anxiety in love affairs.

A child born to-day will be clever, active, and persevering. Have much pride, and a keen wit. The temper will be quick and forceful.

July 30.—For those who celebrate their birthdays to-day a successful year is promised; business and money will increase. Those in employ will have promotion. Girls born between ten and noon will become engaged and marry. Those in literary pursuits need care.

The day is good to buy and speculate in the a.m. and from 4 p.m. Ask favours of superiors and professional people. Good to marry, or for visiting.

A child born this day will be fortunate. In disposition generous, affectionate, and ambitious; perhaps a bit too cautious. Should be in business for itself.

July 31.—To-day's children will have a changeable year. Keep things well in hand if loss is to be avoided. Many unexpected and sudden events. Don't speculate.

Young girls will experience much deceit in their love affairs, and must beware of attentions from married men. Not a good year to travel or voyage.

A child born to-day will be eccentric, and of curious ideas. Not fortunate; unable to save much. Will want to go abroad and travel.

August 1.—Business will need careful attention this year from those whose birthdays fall to-day. Some quarrels and opposition may be expected.

Young people will court and marry, but experience many crosses in love affairs. An accidental year; beware of mishaps and fire.

A child born to-day will be fond of pleasure and luxury. The mind will be quick and active, but changeable and suspicious. If a girl, health not good.

August 2.—Expect sickness in the family circle of those whose birthdays fall to-day. Keep quiet, or losses in business and through property will result. Avoid speculation.

Single girls should have a care in love affairs; their health will need extra attention against chills and serious colds. The day is bad for business. Not good for negotiating with property and land. Bad for doing business with elderly people.

Care should be taken with the health of a child born to-day, if born near nine p.m. It will be fortunate.

August 3.—An active year, giving much doubt and uncertainty. Avoid speculation, and have a care with business and money.

Love affairs will bring anxiety, and young girls should place little confidence in any attentions. Have a care with letters.

A child born to-day should keep in employ. It will be clever and quick, but extravagant and proud. Fond of speculation and pleasure.

August 4.—Many little annoyances and obstacles will come this year to those whose birthdays are celebrated to-day. Will feel much inclined to travel and change residence. See that servants don't rob you.

The day is bad for visiting, pleasure, and love-making. Keep quiet and let others make the first move. Don't engage servants here.

A child born to-day will be restless and fond of change. The temper will be bitter and the wit sarcastic.

"ASTUREL."

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A MISSING WORD.

The Romance of a Misdirected Envelope; Told by a Postmaster.

I BREATHED more freely after it was over. It was a temptation resisted—but I felt better after having done it. As I was sorting the letters preparatory to putting them in the mail-bag for Birmingham, one letter turned up and sent a jealous shock through me that sent my heart throbbing and my brain swimming with a sudden dizziness. I might have expected to have seen it there, but none the less did it affect me when I did see it. It was addressed to "Mr. Joseph Norris, Trent Hall"—and I knew that it was his. I had a dear little note in the same handwriting next to my heart then—a few graceful words thanking me for a book I had sent her—a little note I had read over countless times, and kissed often, wondering if it would displease her to know how fondly I cherished it. I thrust the hateful letter out of my sight, and leaning my hand on the table, lived over again the hopes, the fears, the wretchedness of the last twenty-four hours.

The day before, while distributing the mail, I came across a letter addressed to myself, and on opening it, I learnt that through the generosity of a distant relative, whose name I bore, I had been left an inheritance of twenty thousand pounds. What a change a few strokes of a pen had made—transforming Charles Maurice, postmaster of a secluded English village, into Charles Maurice, the possessor of a competence, well invested, yielding a certain income. And how before my good fortune I had thought of Annie Merrill as one separated from me by my poor circumstances, my salary barely supporting my mother and myself, and how could I ask any woman to share my poverty? Now the burden of poverty was most unexpectedly lifted from me, I felt at liberty to tell her the hopes I had never dared to entertain until now. What would her answer be? That I would learn that very night.

In the same post with my letter was one addressed to her, post-marked Birmingham. Her correspondence all passed through my hands, but I had never seen that writing before. It was large, clear, decisive, the writing of a self-possessed man. Who could the writer be? Annie's uncle, Dr. Merrill, had male correspondents in Birmingham. But this letter was the first that had come to her since she came orphaned from the city a year before, and had been received into her uncle's heart and home. But other thoughts put the question of the letter out of my mind. I sent by a messenger a few hurried lines to my mother at home, to prepare her for our good fortune, and then counted the hours which must pass before I could offer my inheritance to Annie, encumbered with its possessor.

When I reached home I found her there before me. My mother, who had taken her into her favour from the first, her sweetness and orphaned situation proving a passport to her heart, had sent for Annie to communicate the good news to her. She was strangely quiet, I thought, and there was a troubled look in her blue eyes I never saw there before.

In fact, after a while, a subdued feeling stole over us all. Annie's disquiet seemed to impart itself to us. I was thinking how I could venture to tell her all my hopes, and my mother, guessing what my thoughts were, left us together most of the evening, but my heart failed me. It was only when I was walking home with Annie to Dr. Merrill's that I found courage to speak. She helped me by saying that I must not think from her silence that she did not rejoice in the happy change in my prospects, for no one could be more sincere in her congratulations than herself. I answered that my good fortune would be valueless to me unless I could share it with the girl I loved.

"The girl you love?" she repeated questioningly.

I felt her hand tremble on my arm.

"The girl I love," I answered, in tones that she might have interpreted, but failed to do.

"She ought to be a happy woman," she continued. "May I ask if I know her?"

"If you know her!" I cried. "If you know her! Oh, who could she be but you?"

"Me?"

She drew her hand quickly away from my arm, and stood quite still before me.

"Me! Oh, did you say me?"

And then I saw the moonlight falling on her face, and it was not the face of a girl shining in happy confusion when she hears the story of his love from the man she prefers. It was pale and shocked, and then she hid it from me in her hands, and burst into tears.

I needed no other answer. I knew my suit was hopeless.

"Don't cry, dear!" said I. "I never thought to wound you."

"I thought you knew," she went on sobbingly. "I thought my uncle might have told. I am to marry Mr. Norris. I had a letter from him to-day. Oh, can you forgive me?"

She stretched out her little hands imploringly. I took them in mine, and I kissed them while my heart was breaking.

"Forgive you, my darling," I said, "I would forgive you if you killed me, I think. Don't grieve, Annie. I will try to bear it."

We parted at her uncle's without another word, and I went home to the motherly heart that I knew would suffer with me, but whose tender sympathy would uphold me in this hour of bitter trial.

The next day I sent off my resignation, for my mother and I agreed to leave the village where we had passed so many quiet years. It was in the afternoon of the same day that the letter of which I have spoken, that I now know was from my rival, attracted my attention. I took it up reluctantly—I felt I would as readily touch a poisonous snake—and was just about to put the postmark on, when I saw that the address was insufficient. The envelope simply bore the words "Mr. Joseph Norris, Trent Hall." "Birmingham" should have been added, but was omitted, and the letter

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must be consigned to the dead-letter office. With a thrill of savage delight I flung it into the box appropriated to the reception of such castaways, and went on with my evening's work. With that work I went on mechanically, but my thoughts were not agreeably employed.

That, then, was the answer to the missive she had received. But it should be long before he would get it—get it too late perhaps for an explanation; for misunderstandings between lovers had often arisen from a slighter cause than the non-arrival of an expected letter. I pictured him waiting and longing for the letter that would not come, and she poor girl, how her tender heart would be tortured by his imagined neglect, when no answer would be forthcoming. She, I knew, would suffer in silence, and I fondly hoped he would do the same. So I sealed the mail-bag, and waited for the messenger to carry it to the station. The express would pass in an hour and a half. And then a struggle began in my heart. The letter seemed to whisper to me that one little act of mine could send it unimpeded on its mission.

No one, I believe, unless he were in my situation, actuated by the same despairing, selfishly hopeful feelings that were overmastering him, could understand what a base impulse I conquered, when at last, after an hour's temptation, I took the letter from its resting-place, wrote in the one needful word, opened the mail-bag, and let it go. Then after it was done, some hot tears rushed to my eyes. It was my last hope, and I could not help indulging in some weakness over its grave.

Three days after I had the poor satisfaction of seeing the results of my good action in a letter in the handwriting of my rival, addressed to Annie, making its unwished-for appearance, as I knew it would, and shortly after, Dr. Merrill took it away with him as he called for his letters.

Loungers came in and out of the office and went away, finding me little disposed for conversation. Nothing yet was known in the village of my acquisition, so I was spared the pain of listening to congratulations that I was in no mood to hear. When I went home that evening I was surprised to find my mother absent, and still more surprised when, on opening a note she had left for me, I learnt that she was with Annie at Dr. Merrill's, and that I was to follow her there. Hopeless as I felt, the prospect of seeing Annie again promised me only a painful pleasure, but still the thought of being near her had a sweet and sad fascination that I could not resist. When I reached the doctor's, I found himself and my mother seated in his office, so intent on the moves of chess-men, that a mere nod on my entrance showed their consciousness of my arrival. Annie was not there; I found her in the parlour standing upon the hearth-rug, the glow of the firelight shining on her golden hair, and a look of eager, happy expectation in her glance that was new to her sweet face.

"I am glad to see you," she said, giving me her hand. "I have been impatient for your coming—and I will tell you why. There is a question I want you to answer. It perplexes me, and somehow I think I can look to you for its solution. You remember a letter I received in the early part of the week?"

She hesitated and cast down her eyes.

"I have too good reason ever to forget it," I answered bitterly.

I saw her face flush. She went on.

"I answered that letter next day. It was of vital importance to me that it should go then. I was troubled when I wrote it, and addressed it at my uncle's desk while the messenger was waiting to take it to the post. I was called away for a minute while doing so, and when I returned simply gave it to the boy, forgetting that the address was unfinished. Getting no answer for two days I wondered what had happened and suddenly remembered my mistake. I knew too well what the fate of my letter must have been. Judge, then, how relieved I felt when my uncle brought me this," taking from the mantelpiece the letter that had come that morning.

Her eyes searched my face. I took her hands in my own.

"Annie," said I, "I believe I could make no one understand what it cost my jealous heart to rectify that mistake, but I did it. I knew it must be an answer to that letter you spoke of a few nights ago. It ought to prove to you how unselfishly I love you, my darling, when I addressed it and sent it on its way to him. I never thought you would find it out. I did it to spare you a moment's uneasiness. If the man you love cares for you as much as I do, he will make your life a happy one."

"How can I repay your generosity?" she said, in a voice tremulous with feeling. "You could not have acted better if you had had a peep at the contents of that letter. But your reward may be claimed when you read this."

She handed me the missive, and glided out of the room. I took it over to the shaded lamp, and read the following:

"Dear Annie,—When beside your father's bed we entered into an engagement of marriage, I felt, as he did, that the interest of the firm in which he and I were partners would be best sustained by our union.

"I wrote to you notifying you of my readiness to fulfil my part of the agreement, and requesting you to be ready to return with me on Sunday as my wife. You say to me that I must not come. There is but one explanation in this refusal, and that is that you have seen someone who pleases you better than your humble servant. It is but natural, child; I cannot blame you. The young should mate with the young, and I am too much your senior to expect to awake in your youthful heart feelings that have long been lifeless in my own.

"I release you from a promise that I am now aware was made by you under the pressure of the sad circumstances. But this fact can never affect the fatherly regard I have ever entertained for the only child of my dear old friend."

I read no farther. Here was my reward. And how nearly I had lost it by the desire of gratifying an ungenerous impulse. Annie has since assured me that had Joseph Norris arrived on the day designated, so great was her awe of her father's old partner, that she never would have had the courage to contend against her destiny. Indeed, the circumstances of having made the mistake she did in addressing the letter seemed to her troubled mind significant of a deep meaning, and that even beyond the grave her father sought to control her actions.

Annie did not return to the parlour. I found her seated in the doctor's office, apparently interested in the game which just at the moment of my entrance he brought to a victorious conclusion.

"Check——"

"Mate," I cried, finishing the word for him, and catching Annie in my arms, heedless of the astonishment of the elderly pair, I demanded my reward.

Well, John Norris, grey-haired, common-place, and undemonstrative, came to Greenwell to other nuptials than his own. He gave away my dear one with the best of grace, and after the marriage congratulated me on my admission into the firm. My ignorance of his meaning was so apparent, that with a grim smile he enlightened me. With my bride I acquired the half interest in a huge business concern in Birmingham. If Annie had chosen to appear as an orphan, dependent on the bounty of her uncle, she had the after-satisfaction of knowing that the love she won was offered to herself alone, and not to the golden store that attracts so many suitors.

"My dearest," I sometimes say to her, "who would think that in a great measure we owe our happiness to one little missing word?"

G. Parkyn.

TO THOSE WHO WRITE.

A Prize of One Guinea will be paid every week by the Editor for the best short story sent in by any of his readers. Contributions should not be less than 1,500 words in length, and not more than 3,000. The Editor reserves to himself the right to publish any contribution submitted. Stamped addressed envelopes must be inclosed for the return of the stories, but, while every care will be taken, the Editor cannot hold himself responsible for possible loss of MSS.

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The Romance of Pleasant Alley.

Telling of a Strange Discovery with a Happy Denouement.

THE person responsible for the christening of Pleasant Alley must have performed his duty in a spirit of unconscious irony; for never was spot more inaptly described. The houses which formed the court were high and squalid, and by some mysterious law of architecture gradually leant more and more towards each other from the first floor upwards, as though mutually determined that not one ray of the sun should strike upon the paving stones beneath, or their own windows; although I am bound to say that even had this peculiarity not existed the rooms would not have reaped much benefit. There was apparently a rooted objection to glass amongst the inhabitants, for on a modest computation there were not more than six entire panes in the whole four hundred originally put in by the builders; and the holes were covered by a variety of opaque substances which varied from an old stocking to a piece of paper. A sheet of glass represented the price of a meal sufficient for a family reckoned by Pleasant Alley finances, and meals were not so easily come by as to be lightly exchanged for an entire window.

Once in seven days the court received a corporation cleansing, which was really the only bit of pleasure it ever had. This was an innovation of only a few months' standing, and at first had not met with the cordiality it deserved; but gradually Pleasant Alley-ites began to look upon it in the light of a rich joke.

No doubt the authorities' action was dictated by somebody on the board realising that the inhabitants had not much time for cleansing operations—the staple industries of the court being the making of match-boxes at twopence threefarthings a gross, and the sewing of shirts at a few pence per dozen, and to obtain a really comfortable income—say, one shilling and sixpence a day—one wanted to work fourteen out of the twenty-four hours.

Pleasant Alley was undergoing one of these parochial wash and brush-ups, when a young man, dressed in clerical attire, accosted the official who was manipulating the hose, with an inquiry as to where the court led to.

The man having first directed the stream of water at a particularly dirty corner, placed the metal nozzle on the ground, and opined that "It led nowheres as he knew on." He might have added, with perfect truth, that the same remark could be applied to the lives of its residents, but not being given to the utterance of unpleasant truths, didn't.

Undeterred by the information, the clergyman turned up his trousers legs and threaded his way between the pools of water, intent on pushing forward investigations on his own account.

Now we have intimated that the cleansing operations were looked upon as innocent recreation in the alley, and consequently shirts and match-boxes were put aside and the doors and fragmentary windows filled with faces.

Blank amazement was the predominant feeling evoked by the reverend gentleman's sudden appearance.

Nobody ever came down Pleasant Alley unless absolutely forced by duty or the fact of residence, and popular opinion was divided between the visitor being the "school-board" or the rent-collector in disguise—Pleasant Alley was always in a chronic state of backwardness regarding its rent, and held strong personal objections to sending its young to school. Consequently it was given to locking its doors and feigning absence from home when attempts were made to bring it to a proper frame of mind concerning these matters.

Imbued with these doubts concerning the clergyman's *bona-fides*, there was a general exodus of faces from the windows and a general bolting and barring of doors. No single family aspired to more than two rooms in the court, and the majority had to be content with one. For the general convenience the outer portals of the houses were always kept open, and the visitor passed in and gently rapped at the first door. Receiving no response he tried the handle, with no effect, and then passed to the next with a similar result. The first, second, and third floor of that particular house shared the apparent emptiness of the ground one. So he wended his way to No. 2. Here his efforts at last met with success, for the door of the first room he approached was actually ajar. An invitation to enter, came in answer to his tap and he did so.

A young girl rose from the table where she had been sitting sewing blouses, and stood gazing at him.

"I have just lately been appointed one of the curates at St. Peter's, and am paying a round of visits to the parishioners," he said, in explanation of his presence.

There was a pleasant unassuming tone in the way he spoke which appealed to the girl.

"And you look upon we of Pleasant Alley as part of your congregation?" she queried, whilst a smile of half-pathos, half-amusement, parted her lips.

"Certainly, are you not?" he asked, also smiling.

"As much yours as anybody's I suppose—and you expect us to come to church perhaps?"

"We should like you to."

"Then I am afraid you will be sadly disappointed. In the first place, we have little or no time; and as a second reason, there is little or no inclination—I don't mean to be rude, although it may sound so. I simply state the facts," she said apologetically, and then burst out with another question. "Do you know what it is to be poor?"

"I am not overburdened with riches," he responded simply.

"I am not referring to genteel poverty, the poverty which just manages to make both ends meet," she remarked quietly, "although that is no doubt hard enough for a proud man or woman to bear; but the never ceaseless struggle to earn the bare necessities of life, the constant suspense as to where the next meal is coming from. The kind of poverty which forces one to sew a dozen of these"—she picked up the blouse she was working on—"at tenpence a dozen. It takes twelve hours a day hard work to earn ten shillings a week. Think of it, ten shillings a week for rent, food, and clothes. Can you wonder that when the seventh day comes round we have no desire for church, we simply want to sit down and rest our weary fingers, and gather up what strength we may for the labours of the coming week?"

What could he say? What can any minister of the gospel

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say when he is brought face to face with such weary misery as this? The Reverend Arthur Wilson was a very young man, but many a one his senior has been nonplussed in a similar position. He might have offered platitudes concerning the consolation religion can bring even to such toil-worn creatures as the girl before him, but under the circumstances they would have fallen little short of insults. Intuition told him that the best course to pursue would be to put into words the fact that although he had not experienced the life she spoke of, yet he sympathised with the people who had to endure it from the bottom of his heart, and he did so.

"I am sure you do," she answered, and the bitterness melted from her voice. "Yet you are powerless to help us. I suppose we are beyond all assistance. Sometimes I wonder if the money which is spent in carrying Christianity to savages beyond the sea, might not be better spent at home. There is, I believe, an enormous building, with a large staff of clerks and missionaries, which issues I don't know how many tons of tract literature each year for the benefit of people in foreign lands, who must first be taught to read it. I would not decry for one moment the noble men and women who often give their lives for the furtherance of that work, but does it not sometimes strike them that there is labour here in Christian England for them to do.

"Do the charitable people who subscribe the thousands of pounds for this, never realise that at their very doors there are immortal souls to be saved, souls which are groping in the dark because the bodies in which they are enclosed are slowly withering away for the want of a little sustenance. To me it seems that not a penny of that money should leave the land whilst such places as Pleasant Alley and its counterparts exist."

"Hush!" interrupted the clergyman, "our religion demands that we should spread the Word of God abroad. There are religious workers in England, remember. I can quite understand how hard it appears, but I must remind you that the vast majority of the people you speak of are benighted beings worshipping fictitious gods through sheer ignorance of there being any brighter, better religion. Surely you would not be so unjust as to condemn them to remain in darkness from which they cannot hope to emerge unless we send Christian men and women out to teach them the path which leads to the light. There are places of worship here open to all, and it rests with ourselves whether we avail ourselves of the teaching their ministers are ready to impart; there would be no such facilities in the countries you speak of unless we made them."

"Maybe you are right," she answered wearily. "Yet there are so many savages who badly need Christianising here in London—the men who grow rich by doling out the merest pittance to girls and women for work such as this" again her toil-worn fingers touched the blouse—"aye, and even worse-paid for labour which you will find in some of the other rooms of this house. The draper who gives his assistants inferior food as a part of their wages; the landlords who exact exorbitant rents for such hovels as these; the thousand and one harpies who prey on unskilled labour. All would be the better for clerical ministrations. Do not misunderstand me, we would not accept charity. All we ask is a fair rate of pay for our labour, enough to allow us to have perhaps two hours out of the twenty-four for rest and recreation."

"It is not my province to speak harshly of any man," he said sadly, "but I am afraid those you speak of are solely given over to the worship of Mammon, and are irreclaimable. Is there no other way in which we can fight the evil they bring about; for instance, would it not be possible to make some arrangements of a co-operative nature, whereby the worker could be brought into direct communication with the buyer and thus get the full value of his or her work?"

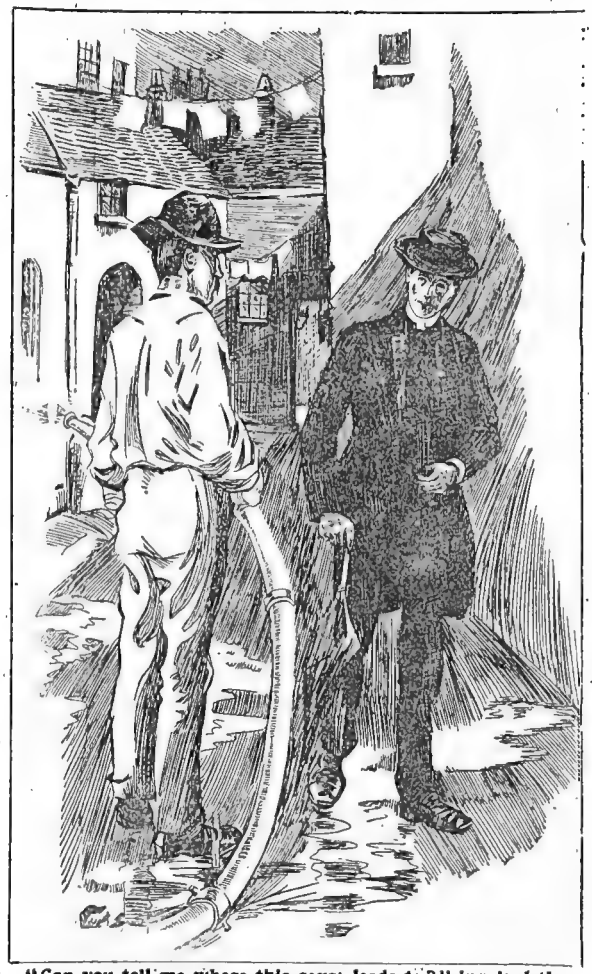
"I have often thought of that," she replied, looking at him with curious eyes, "but you know that would require capital."

"But it might be obtained," he said eagerly.

"Yes, that would be the solution of the problem," she agreed quietly.

The Reverend Arthur remained talking a few more minutes and then bade her good-bye, promising to call again. He visited several other people in Pleasant Alley, for his long stay in their neighbour's room had convinced the remainder that he could not be the rent-collector or school-board.

The same wretched struggle for existence was the predominating feature of all. He learnt that the name of the girl he had just seen was Daisy Lawson, and that she had lived in the Alley for a year. She appeared to have been a stranger to all previous to that, but she was universally loved and respected. Many a kindness had she shown to her fellow



"Can you tell me where this court leads to?" inquired the clergyman.

strugglers; each had something to tell which added to the interest he took in her.

His thoughts were very busy with her, as he walked away. There was an air of refinement about her which was strangely out of keeping with the sordid surroundings. Her mode of speech was that of an educated woman, and he had noticed that her hands were white and well-shaped in spite of the finger-tips being disfigured by the needle she so ceaselessly plied. Then she was beautiful, not perhaps judged on severely classical lines, but beautified with high resolve and steadfast courage. What could such a woman be doing in Pleasant Alley? Surely there must be more congenial work for such as her?

They met very often in the few weeks that followed. For,

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after consulting her, he had taken a large room in the Alley wherein they held a short, bright service on Sunday afternoons; then, too, he made a rule of spending whatever time he could spare from his many duties with them at their labour. Six or eight would bring their work to one apartment and he would read aloud something they were interested in, or chatted on subjects which appealed to them. He found much to admire in these people. Truly, there is no charity which surpasses that of the poor to the poor, and amongst them all there were none who showed more kindness to her fellows than Daisy Lawson, done, moreover, in a quiet, unostentatious way.

He never heard another word of complaint from her after the little outbreak when they first met, and knew now, although she had never told him, that her object on that occasion had been to point out the way in which he might be of use to Pleasant Alley.

He had been working very hard to raise funds to make arrangements which would redeem the actual workers from the grip of the middle-man, but the church to which Arthur Wilson belonged was not a rich one, and he had no influence in financial circles which could be exerted. He often lamented to Daisy his inability to do more for the people, but although plainly sympathising with the object she did not seem much perturbed or surprised at its non-success. The Reverend Arthur rather wondered at this, knowing how near the plan was to her heart. Truth to tell, it was rather disappointing. He did not like to feel that she was uninterested in his undertakings.

Perhaps the dismay this brought caused him to rigidly examine his feelings towards her. "Why should I mind? What is she to me?" he asked himself. And even as the thought was formed the answer came: "Because she is all the world to you, because you love her."

Yes, ever since the day they had first met, the affection had been steadily growing, unsuspected by him, and now he knew she was the only woman he could ever wish to make his wife.

With the timidity of the genus lover he one day put his fate to the test.

She heard him to the finish in silence, but the soft light which came to her eye gave hope.

"And in spite of my only being a work-girl—a woman of the people, you love me?" she asked, all aglow with tenderness.

"That is but another reason why you should consent. Think of the assistance your knowledge of the workers will be to me in my ministration," he pleaded ardently.

"If only for that I suppose I should have to consent," she said, with a happy smile.

He gathered her in his arms, pressing his lips to hers, as he asked jealously:

"And for no other reason, sweetheart?"

"Yes," she murmured shyly. "Because I love you dearly."

There were many other sweet things they said to one another, but it is not within our province to record them. There is one item of the conversation that must be referred to, however.

He had been speaking hopefully of some day getting enough money to bring their pet project into being.

"But suppose we needn't wait," she asked. "Suppose, after all, I should turn out to a rich woman masquerading as a poor one."

"You?" he gasped.

"Yes," she said solemnly. "For that is what I really am. I trust you will not like me the less on that account."

He gave her osculatory proof to the contrary.

Then Daisy told him that it was quite true. How she also had been struck with the idea of bettering the people's lot on the same lines as those he had laid down, and had determined to live their life for a year so that she might learn the best mode of putting it into execution.

"So now you can start as soon as you like, sir," she finished.

And they did, with most happy results. Would that there were more like them.

Martin H. Potter.

Woman and her Watch.

Perhaps a woman can't sharpen pencils and throw stones in just the orthodox way, but she can take care of a watch. Her ministrations begin with winding the watch, which she never thinks of doing unless she is going shopping or on a journey.

Then, if she doesn't break the mainspring, she tucks the watch inside her dress, where the multitudinous hooks and buttons scrape and scratch the case, and where it requires a half-hour's investigation when she wants to see what time it is.

At night, when she takes off her dress, she forgets all about it, of course, and sends it whizzing under the bed as she throws back her bodice preparatory to wrestling her way out of it.

If it stops she isn't at all disconcerted. With a serenity born of long experience she picks it up and shakes it until it ticks again.

After all it is only the unusually careful woman who wears her watch inside her dress, for the intricate fastenings of the fashionable bodices render it well nigh impossible. She has the happy fashion of tucking it into the pocket of her cloak, or dumping it into the bottom of the bag she carries about with her, and which usually contains everything, from cough lozenges to her marriage certificate, or tucking it away, along with half a hundred samples, her latch keys, and small change, in her purse.

Jewellers have wise instincts, notice quickly, and cater well to sweet woman's whims. They understand that there is no earthly use in remonstrating with women, and explaining that it is their own fault that their watches never keep accurate time, and are constantly in need of repair.

No; they philosophically set about making little purses and card-cases, with a separate apartment for the watch, and an aperture in the outside, through which the hands may be seen; they set them in bracelets to be clasped about their wrist; they introduce them into the handles of umbrellas; they bury them in the heart of flower petals with a pin at the back; and, last of all, they have produced the woman's delight—the chatelaine.

This octopus arrangement of silver and gold pins on the one side, or slides over the belt, or winds girdlewise about her waist, but in any event it keeps the watch swaying and banging against all the other knives and smelling-bottles and shears and things with which she burdens herself in a perfectly delightful way that is warranted to thwart the purpose of the best-disposed timepiece ever manufactured.

There is only one other way in which she shows her ingenuity to better advantage than in the matter of watch management. She can think of a few more things to do with a cross baby than she can with a watch, but not many.

F. P. W.

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THE CONFESSIONS OF CYNTHIA.

Revelations in High Life by a Lady's Companion.

The writer of this series of true stories acted for many years in the capacity of lady's companion to a Society adventuress who lived by robbing her unsuspecting guests. Names have, for obvious reasons, been altered, but the facts are correct.

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS:

Mrs. NORTON	An adventuress who makes her money by robbing her friends.
CYNTHIA	Her cousin and companion who, when the events related below took place, was quite unsuspicious of Mrs. Norton's guilt.
FLUFFY	An accomplice of Mrs. Norton's.
LORD KINROSS	One of Mrs. Norton's most devoted admirers.
SIR JOHN STRICKLAND	A poor baronet who is deeply in love with Mrs. Norton.
MARY VERNON . . .	At one time engaged to be married to Lord Kinross.
HIRAM PETTIGREW .	An American millionaire.
PERCIVAL HOPE . . .	Pettigrew's secretary.

Mrs. Norton: Adventuress.

Cynthia: Her companion.

FRANKIE WINS A DRESS, AND I LOSE EIGHT HUNDRED POUNDS.

FOR THE BENEFIT OF NEW READERS.

CYNTHIA tells in the opening chapter of her arrival at her cousin's in the capacity of companion, and of her discovery that Mrs. Norton is taking part in midnight card games, at which large sums of money are being lost and won. The climax is reached one night when Mary Vernon stakes her diamond ear-rings (a gift from Lord Kinross) and one of the onlookers finds them to be paste. Mary Vernon declares that they are exactly as given to her by Lord Kinross, whereupon Kinross breaks off the engagement. The diamonds subsequently appear as a gift from Fluffy to Mrs. Norton, set in a pair of hat-pins. A few weeks later the notorious Mrs. Norton, with Fluffy's help, succeeds in stealing a pocket-book, containing about eight thousand pounds in paper money, from Hiram Pettigrew at the Café Regal, by substituting for the millionaire's pocket-book one exactly like it. Later on Cynthia discovers the original pocket-book, empty of course, in one of her boxes. Not knowing what to do, she confides in Fluffy, who is very kind, but makes her promise to say nothing at all to anyone else on the subject. He takes charge of the duplicate pocket-book. Mrs. Norton now moves into her new house in Pont Street, and it is while here that Sir John Strickland, a poor baronet, proposes to her. She refuses, but hints to him that if he will consent to allow his name to appear on the directorate of certain companies he will be bound to make money, and then her answer might be different. Mrs. Norton is next presented at Court by her friend, Lady Gaveston. For this function she wears some superb diamonds which have been lent her by Lord Kinross. The Society papers declare her to be the most beautiful and best-dressed woman at the presentation. The same evening Lord Kinross calls at Pont Street for a private interview, and it is during this interview that Percival Hope enters the room unannounced, and makes the startling statement that Mary Vernon has discovered the thief who stole her diamonds. Shortly afterwards Mrs. Norton leaves the room, Cynthia however stays, unknown to Kinross and Percival Hope. While there she overhears Hope, who turns out to be Kinross' cousin, tell Kinross that in a fortnight's time he will prove to Kinross that Mrs. Norton is an adventuress living upon the proceeds of the robbery of her friends. Cynthia tells Mrs. Norton what she has overheard. On the evening of the next day Lady Gaveston tells Mrs. Norton that she doesn't approve of her behaviour towards Sir John Strickland, and that unless she decides at once either to marry or refuse him, she will return to Scotland. Mrs. Norton asks for and obtains a fortnight's grace in which to make up her mind.

WHATEVER future unpleasantness Fate—or Percival Hope—might have in store for her, at present Frankie had things all her own way. She was Society's latest fad, and, to quote the pink youth—"ran Society for all it was worth." Smart women besieged her with invitations, and a call at Pont Street was an indispensable part of the day's programme for a man about town.

Each morning, perfectly turned out, Frankie went for a canter in the Park, varied by an excursion in a celebrity's car, or a drive on a somebody's coach.

Mrs. Norton's admirers increased and multiplied in those days; among a certain set our house was called the "Barracks," because it was always full of Army men.

The table at luncheon every day was crammed. All sorts of people used to drop in. Notorieties who ate a lot and said little, geniuses who talked a great deal and drank more. Millionaires who bored themselves, Members of Parliament who bored their neighbours, actors who bored everyone impartially, and a few nice commonplace persons with good manners. The food was always lovely at Pont Street, and the wine, thanks to Sir John, excellent.

After luncheon and a half-hour's gossip over cigarettes and coffee, Frankie would change her frock and drive to a swagger "At Home," a smart bazaar, or some important function.

Her frocks were things to dream of. "What Mrs. Norton wore" was one of the principal items in the report of any fashionable gathering. Occasionally I accompanied her, more often I spent the afternoon with Lady Paula, sometimes with Toby Ffolliott, a friend of Lord Kinross and devoted to my cousin.

It was Toby who told me that Lord Chesterton was driving Frankie down to Epsom for the Derby.

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"Chesterton always drives fast nags and pretty women!" observed young Ffolliott. "His turn-out is sure to be the smartest on the road. You are coming, of course?"

I intimated that, as yet, I had not been asked.

"Chesterton told me he'd done so; he's not usually forgetful. He's very keen about having you, Miss Hamilton."

That evening Frankie came to my room.

"Lord Chesterton is going to drive me down to Epsom," she said in a casual way. "Would you care to come? I don't suppose he'd mind."

It wasn't a nice way of conveying an invitation. I felt hurt and showed my annoyance.

"If Lord Chesterton wants me to go he can ask me himself," I replied. "I don't care for second-hand invitations."

Frankie stared.

"Oh, if you are going to put on frills," she laughed, "I've nothing more to say. Good-night, Cynthia."

The next day I got a letter from Lord Chesterton inviting me in due form.

"Shall I go, Frankie?" I asked.

She looked at me steadily for a moment, then shrugged her shoulders. "I suppose so," she said, and the matter dropped.

All the same, I knew Frankie did not want me at the Derby—with Lord Chesterton, at any rate.

Derby day fell in May that year—a beautiful morning, fresh and sweet with a summer sky and a soft west breeze.

Frankie came down to an early breakfast looking radiant. She used to put in an occasional appearance at the meal to appease Lady Gaveston, who stigmatised breakfast in bed as ungodly.

Just as we were finishing Frankie was summoned to see Madame Clairette, her dressmaker.

"Come with me, Cynthia," she said, "I am afraid Clairette is going to be unpleasant about her bill."

Frankie's forebodings were fully realised. Clairette was most unpleasant, not to say rude. She announced that after repeated applications demanding her account she had called for it in person.

"I'm tired of waiting for my bill, Mrs. Norton, and weary of your broken promises to pay it; I have come to tell you that I must and will have my money. For nine months I have supplied your costumes, in many cases your hats and underskirts as well. I won't do it any longer. There is my account, £2,000; now, are you going to pay me?"

"Not this morning, my good Clairette," said my cousin imperturbably, "I can't spare the money. It's Derby day, you know, and I've made a heavy book."

"Then I give you no more clothes. Not even the dress for the Duchess of Warminster's ball," The little woman—she was very small and very dowdy—fairly bristled with indignation.

"So much the worse for you, Clairette; every one of your clients shall hear of your insolence before the day is out. I'm not the only woman who runs a long bill, remember. You'll find that no credit will mean no customers in your case."

The dressmaker flushed, her retort came quickly.

"My other clients are *different*," she said spitefully. "I would give them six months or six years' credit. I should be sure of my money at the end. But"—she paused—"I can't afford to run any risks, Mrs. Norton; £2,000 is a large sum."

"You are extremely insolent!" said Frankie.

"I'm sorry, ma'am. I want my money."

"I can let you have £500 on account," said my cousin at last. "That will suit you, I suppose?"

Clairette paused; then, looking straight at Frankie, answered decidedly: "No! I won't supply any more clothes until the whole is paid, Mrs. Norton, and that's the truth!" She snapped her teeth, and shook her head with emphasis.

For the first time Frankie looked anxious; I had felt terribly uncomfortable throughout the interview. I was sorry for Clairette, but even more sorry for my cousin. I happened to know that she was very short of money at the moment; her dividends were as usual overdue, the account at the Bank overdrawn.

Consider the situation! She had been asked to the Duchess of Warminster's ball—the "event of the season!" She had anticipated creating a sensation, climbing another step up the social ladder. It had needed no little skill on Frankie's part to win an invitation from the Duchess; she valued the recognition it implied and was determined to make the most of it. And now at the last moment was her triumph to be jeopardised, her efforts nullified by a dressmaker? Without £2,000 Clairette would not give up the gown specially designed for the great occasion. Without the gown the ball for Frankie was impossible. And the date was fixed for to-morrow night!

How in the world could poor Frankie find £2,000—and by to-morrow night? A difficult problem, but my cousin solved it.

"Very well," she said curtly, "you shall have the money. I want my dress otherwise I should not entertain your demand for a moment." She sat down and rapidly wrote out a cheque for the amount. "As you are here you may as well see the gown on me, Clairette. It may want a little alteration, and I sha'n't have time to-morrow. Cynthia," she turned to me, "take a hansom, will you, and drive to Clairette's place in Bond Street? I want you to bring back my dress while madame waits."

For a second the dressmaker hesitated. It was on the cards for her to veto my cousin's proposition, to decline to give up either her time or the frock. She glanced quickly, half suspiciously from the cheque to my cousin's face. What she read there seemed to give her reassurance. She pocketed the pink slip of paper, and consented to remain.

Frankie followed me into the hall. "Don't you come away without the gown, Cynthia, you understand?" she whispered.

"Yes; but, Frankie, what will you do? You're overdrawn at the bank, you know. Clairette will find that out as soon as she presents the cheque, and then——" I stopped, troubled at the thought of what might happen.

Frankie smiled.

"Don't worry," she said lightly. "I'm not quite a fool. The cheque is crossed, Cynthia, and therefore won't be presented at my bank for two days at least. By that time I shall have got the money somehow."

Somehow! Long afterwards I understood what the expression meant.

I drove to Bond Street, captured the frock, and returned in triumph. Clairette put the finishing touches required and departed in peace.

"She's an atrocious woman!" said Frankie, as the door shut behind her. "But, thank goodness, whatever happens I have got my frock."

Atrocious or not, Clairette was undoubtedly an artist. Frankie was wearing one of her *chefs d'œuvres* that very day. The gown was of dead white cloth embroidered in gold. The coat bodice fitting like a glove opened over a full vest of *point d'Alençon* caught across the bust by an Indian clasp of fine gold beautifully jewelled. The waist belt and coat buttons matched the clasp. The long, closely-cut gown clung to her supple figure—a figure crowned with a picture hat framing the golden glory of her hair.

"The Norton" was a notable success that day. Everybody turned to look at the fair woman in the white and gold.

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My own frock was biscuit-coloured cloth, with a lovely little Eton jacket in tucked silk of the same shade, with turquoise buttons. When I was ready I went to show myself to Frankie.

I found my cousin poring over a letter. Frankie had the post-bag brought to her room every morning, and sorted the contents herself.

"Do you know this writing, Cynthia?" she asked, handing me the letter in question.

"Why it's Percival Hope's!" I replied. "Has he been writing to you, Frankie?"

"No, not to me," she said scornfully, "to my maid," and she showed me an envelope addressed to Ella Martin.

"You may as well read the letter," she continued. "See what he says for yourself."

Considerably astonished, I read as follows:

"I am sorry to hear of your trouble. I may be able to help you if you give me fuller details. Meet me South Kensington Station this afternoon at five, and I will see what can be done. "PERCIVAL HOPE."

Ella Martin and Percival Hope, the conjunction of names was ominous!

"Wherever did you find the letter, Frankie?" I cried; "and what on earth does it mean?"

"Never mind where I found it, Cynthia, I have it and that is enough. As for the meaning, that's plain. Hope swore he would bring Kinross proofs that I was an adventuress; he wants Ella to help him get 'em. Briefly, he's going to pump her, ascertain what she knows, and all she imagines about me. It is easy enough to see *that*; what puzzles me is how he opened up communications with her without my knowing," and she glanced towards the post-bag. "He'll bribe her heavily to speak; the question is if I can't bribe her more heavily and keep her silent."

"But, Frankie——"

"I know what you're going to say, child," my cousin cried impatiently, "that Ella knows nothing about me—nothing to my disadvantage, at all events. That is so, of course. All the same, I don't want her and Percival to meet; what is more, they *shall not*. Ring the bell, will you—I'll have Ella in and speak to her."

"Wait till-to-morrow, Frankie," I urged. "Lord Chesterton will be here directly; we shall be late if you speak now."

"Don't be ridiculous, Cynthia. I must see her at once,—at once, I tell you—there's not a moment to be lost!"

She leant back, her lips compressed, her eyes hard; there was a look of tense anxiety about her—anxiety I could not understand.

"I want you to match this silk for me, Ella," she said smiling, herself once more as the girl entered. "I'm afraid it will take you some time, the colour is so uncommon. Still, it is a bright morning and the walk will do you good. You are not looking very well," she went on kindly, "what's the matter with you?"

"A little tired, ma'am, that's all, thank you."

"A little worried also, I think, Ella. What is troubling you—anything money will help?"

"You're very kind, but it's not money, thank you."

She hesitated for a moment, then went on quickly: "If you remember, ma'am, I told you about a week ago I was in great distress about a young man who had enlisted for a soldier. I wanted to know if there was any hope of getting his discharge—his regiment's ordered to the Front!"

"I remember something about it *now*, Ella. But I've been so busy lately it went out of my head."

The girl looked sullen. She answered with a touch of resentment.

"It doesn't matter *now*, thank you. I have found friends who will help me in the matter. I shouldn't have mentioned it again, ma'am, only you asked what was troubling me."

Frankie smiled sweetly.

"I am glad you have found some friends," she said. "Who is the young man, Ella—your brother?"

"No, ma'am."

"Then it's your sweetheart."

The girl flushed. My cousin touched her lightly on the shoulder. "Come," she said in a low caressing voice, "tell me all about it."

Ella caught her breath.

"Oh, ma'am," she cried, then, with a burst of sobs: "We were to have been married next year, and now he's gone for a soldier, and perhaps he'll get shot."

"He had a tiff with you, I suppose, and like a foolish fellow enlisted?"

Ella nodded, trying to control her sobs.

"Jim's an engraver by trade," she continued, "and earning good money. But I told you all about him once before, ma'am." Resentment was creeping back into her voice. "There's no occasion for me to trouble you again."

"I am so sorry, Ella, that I didn't pay more attention at the time. However, it is not too late. Where is your sweetheart stationed?"

"At Chelsea. But I don't want you to trouble, thank you, ma'am. I have found friends whom I am sure will help me."

She tightened her lips and gazed defiantly at Frankie.

"You can't have too many friends," returned my cousin, "and I'm willing to be one of them." She looked at the girl with a bright smile. "Would you like to see your sweetheart to-day, Ella—this very afternoon?"

"Ma'am!" Ella turned crimson. "If I only could!" She looked wistfully and clasped her hands.

"Well, then you shall. I think I can manage it for you. I'll give you a note to Captain Bartlett—he's at Chelsea just now, and he will get a few hours' leave for Jim to go out with you. Dry your tears and look cheerful, Ella, or your sweetheart won't be pleased to see you. Nothing bores a man like a woman in the dumps, and men never forgive being bored. They'll look over everything but *that*. Here is a note for Captain Bartlett; get off at once and have a good time. I'll talk to you to-morrow about Jim's discharge. I won't forget this time, I promise you. Good-bye."

The door closed on the comforted Ella. My cousin took a quick, hard breath, and began to pace the room muttering to herself the while:

"Hope won't meet her this afternoon or to-morrow—I'll take care of that. The next day he may contrive to see her—call here when I'm out perhaps. By that time I must have my plans ready. Somehow or other this Jim must get his discharge through me, that will insure Ella's silence and checkmate Hope. Yes, I shall pull through yet. A little luck and then—— If only she doesn't tell about the photograph, if only——" My cousin stopped abruptly and stared at me hard.

"I've a bad habit of talking to myself," she said, "but what I say is always nonsense. Do you hear, *nonsense!*" She caught me by the arm.

But I made no reply, a vague suspicion silenced me—suspicion of Frankie. I turned my face away.

The next moment she was kneeling on the floor beside me, her hands clasping mine.

"What is it?" she said quickly; "there's a strange look, a new look on your face. It's as though you don't trust me, as though you suspected me of something wrong. What does it mean, Cynthia? What have I done?"

"Nothing, nothing!" I protested, ashamed already of my doubt.

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"CONFESSIONS OF CYNTHIA."
New Series of Stories.

"I never thought *you* would turn against me," she went on. "Oh, I know there's a lot in my life you cannot understand. How should you. You don't realise how I have to fight my way. Every woman I meet has her knife in me. Because they smile do you think they like me in their hearts? I tell you they hate me, fear me, envy me. Why? Because I'm stronger than they are, and *they know it*. They grudge me success, and plot and plan to bring me failure. And you—you that I thought so different—are as bad as the rest!" She rose impetuously and turned away from me.

"No, no, Frankie; don't say such things!"

"Go!" she said, "at once, if you prefer. I would not have you stay with me a moment against your will. You can return to Bruges, go back to the convent to-day, if you wish!"

The convent! High white walls upon a green hillside, steeped in the sunshine of a summer afternoon, rose before me. I heard the hum of the children's voices, the chime of the convent bell. The sisters with their meek smiles and gentle eyes stood beside me. The wind brought me the fragrance of the lilies, full of the peace of that life, so very far from this.

For a moment I was drawn towards it—but only for a moment. Already I repented and reproached myself for doubting Frankie. I was very fond of her, and of the life, and—well, of somebody else who played a not unimportant part in it.

"I don't want to leave you, Frankie dear!" I said. "And I think nothing but what's kind about you."

For a moment she hesitated, then turned and kissed me several times. The crisis was over; we were reconciled.

"Come," she said brightly, "we're friends now, let's enjoy ourselves."

She seized my hand, together we raced downstairs, to the consternation of the butler, not to mention Lady Gaveston.

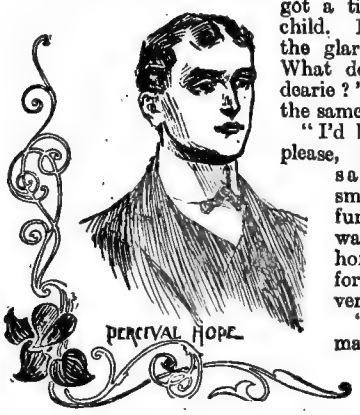
The rest of the party were waiting for us. Lord Chesterton, Toby Ffolliott, one or two Army men, and a sporting Baronet named Fulke—this last was accompanied by his sister, a sweet thing, with pink cheeks and golden hair that did not match. Mrs. Curtis Blount was also with us, but the faithful Algy for once did not accompany her. She looked very handsome in pale grey with pink roses, but did not seem in the best of tempers, and snapped me up quite sharply.

Lord Chesterton looked distinguished in his Newmarket coat. Well set up, with square shoulders, and a deep chest, his keen blue eyes looked out from a face tanned by the sun; a quiet face with reserves of power, a massive chin, and firmly-modelled mouth. A silent, and one felt a strong man.

"I'm very glad you are coming, Miss Hamilton," he said kindly. "Toby declared you wouldn't trust yourself to me. I was awfully down in the mouth about it. I want you on the box-seat, don't you know."

I felt immensely flattered, but, before I could reply, Frankie answered for me.

"It's quite nice of you, Lord Chesterton, but Cynthia's got a tiresome headache, poor child. I am afraid she'd feel the glare too much in front. What do you think yourself, dearie?" She smiled, but all the same I didn't like it.



"I'd better take a *back seat* please, Lord Chesterton." I said spitefully. He smiled but made no further protest. Frankie was placed in the seat of honour, Toby made room for me beside him at the very back.

"I'm sorry," that young man observed, glancing at Chesterton,

"Why?" I asked sharply.

"Partly for Chesterton. He wanted you beside him. Mostly for myself—I wanted Frankie."

"I do hope you are not going to be silly about my cousin," I said crossly, I was getting tired of Frankie's lovers.

"I'm silly already," he returned. "I'd give my life for her," he added with a sudden fierce energy.

"You are really very foolish, Toby. What is the good of caring for a woman who never thinks of you, barely knows you are alive?"

"That's what *you* say," returned Toby with unruffled good humour. "As for the good of it, I don't know, but it seems to me, it must be good for a fellow to care for a woman like her. It makes him hate anything low down, you know, or mean. Anyway, I can't help myself. I shall go on caring all my life. There's nothing I wouldn't do for her, *nothing*," he added under his breath.

He amused me at the time with his boyish fervour. Later on I remembered what he had said, and I felt sorry.

"It's not very likely that she'll ever want me to do anything, worse luck," he continued. "Does she ever speak of me, Cynthia?"

His honest, boyish face was terribly wistful, there was a look in his brown eyes one hated to see. I felt sorry for him, but it was no good to encourage him in being silly. The sooner he was cured the better. So with a hard heart and clear conscience I said "Never!"

"It's utterly hopeless," I continued. "You are a nice boy, Toby, not too clever and quite good-tempered. But you've no money, and you're no match, for Frankie, at all events."

He nodded gloomily, and muttered something about "prospects." But I thought it wiser not to hear, and commenced to talk about Lady Paula.

"She's gone down to Cromer with Lord Kinross. It isn't often he misses a Derby, is it, Toby?"

"First one for years. When is he coming back to town?"

"The end of next week," I said, and the words brought a touch of apprehension. The end of next week—the end also of the fortnight in which so much was going to happen.

Once arrived at Epsom, I saw little of Frankie, she went straight to see the favourites in the paddock. A lot of women went with her, but I preferred to remain where I was. People made a great fuss over my cousin that day. Everyone seemed talking about her, and a certain great personage desired an introduction, and invited, or perhaps I ought to say, "commanded" her to lunch.

It was one of the most brilliant Derbys there had been for years. The scene was dazzling. The grand stand gay with smart people perfectly dressed, the drags with their glossy horses, the crowd of pretty girls in summer frocks against the background of green trees, through which one caught a glimpse of the Downs, cool, refreshing, stretching away into the distance.

Lord Chesterton bought a bouquet of violets and mauve heartsease, which he asked me to wear.

"Violet and mauve are my colours," he explained. "I've entered Nestor for the Derby, you know."

"I hope he'll win. I think I'd like to back him, if you please, Lord Chesterton."

"In gloves?" he said, laughing. "Very well, Miss Cynthia, I'll let you know my size."

"Surely you're not going to bet against your own horse?" I asked.

"I'd do more than that," he answered, "to win a pair of gloves from you."

He looked at me quite strangely as he spoke. I turned red, and felt uncomfortable.

Mrs. Curtis Blount gave a horrid little laugh as he moved away.

"Are you going to pin your faith on the horse or his owner?" she said.

"Lord Chesterton is not going to ride, is he?" I asked.

She stared hard at me.

"No," she said, sneering, "not in *this* race." Then, "Why don't you put some money on Nestor. I will lend

you a pony if you want it. You're sure to win, you know, and it would please Lord Chesterton. Perhaps you think it wrong to bet? Poor little innocent," she smiled in a horrid superior fashion, that made me feel very young and altogether inexperienced.

"I don't think it is wrong at all," I said bluntly, not having any very clear ideas upon the matter.

"Afraid to lose the money perhaps?" she grinned maliciously, opened her purse, and held out a note.

"I'm not a bit afraid, thank you," I returned, boiling with indignation.

She leant towards me and dropped the note into my lap. I ought of course to have refused it, but I was horribly afraid of being laughed at. Besides, Nestor was sure to win—Mrs. Curtis Blount herself had said so, and I could repay the money within an hour or two.

My fingers closed over the piece of paper. Mrs. Blount patted my hand encouragingly.

"That's right," she said. "Give it to Toby, he'll fix it up for you, and"—she paused—"if you like I'll book you a bet or two upon the nod. I know Bell the bookie quite well. You'll rake in a nice little sum this journey, if you'll leave it to me."

Flustered and annoyed both with her and myself, I gave a half-mechanical consent, which the next instant I longed to recall. I turned to do so quickly, but Mrs. Blount had vanished. Presently I saw her confabulating with a burly man, apparently the bookie.

Much of what she had said was Greek to me. I had no idea as to the extent of the transactions she was entering into on my behalf, and was foolishly ashamed to ask for an explanation. I realised I had made a bet of £25, which Toby had duly fixed up for me, but that, I thought, was the extent of my liability.

It came upon me like a thunderclap when Mrs. Blount returned and in a loud tone of voice explained that I stood to win £500, or lose £800 on Nestor.

Lord Chesterton heard what she said; he gave a little shrug and looked quite coldly at me.

"I hate to see a young girl bet to such an extent," he said to Ffolliott. He turned away and took no further notice of me.

Mrs. Curtis Blount smiled maliciously, and I hated her worse than ever.

I shall never forget that Derby. I could not follow the horses with the glasses, my hands trembled so. My heart thumped, and my head throbbed. The words "eight hundred pounds" beat in my brain.

The roar of the people on the course made me shake. I was sick with fear. Suppose I lost, what should I do, where could I hope to get eight hundred pounds?

How I wished that wretched Curtis Blount woman had not interfered with me. It was as though she had entrapped me into making the bets for some purpose of her own. And yet why should she do so? What grudge could she have against me?

I was to find an answer to both those questions—but not then.

I felt I could not bear the strain much longer. If only the race were over, decided one way or the other. I shut my eyes and waited in horrible suspense.

Of a sudden there came a lull, as though everyone had caught their breath, and then a great shout filled the air.

The Derby was over.

Nestor was beaten.

I owed eight hundred pounds!

(Another splendid instalment is published on Friday.)

Wife: "A penny for your thoughts, my dear." Husband: "I was thinking of one of Shakespeare's sayings, 'What fools we mortals be.'" Wife: "I suppose that does come home to you rather hard at times, but what particular recollection brought about this train of thought?" Husband: "The recollection of our courtship, dear, when I used to call you 'Birdie.'"

Your Editor Chats.

This week, as you will have seen, I begin my series of tartan covers with the Menzies plaid. As I think I mentioned last week I intend to reproduce, from time to time, on the covers of this little paper, coloured representations, correct in every detail, of the tartans of all the principal clans of Scotland, and I am hoping to use the next one on the cover of the number dated August 16th.

MORE ABOUT CYNTHIA.

The letter which I published a week or so ago from a correspondent who was under the impression that she met Mrs. Norton and Cynthia at a seaside boarding house, some few years back, and wanted me to give her Cynthia's real name, in order that she might be of financial help to her, has been followed by communications from several other readers, all of whom are most anxious that I should disclose Cynthia's real identity. But this I really cannot do, at present, at all events.

MY HOLIDAY NUMBER.

I should like to say here that next week's number is to be a particularly good one. It is our holiday number, and will contain a splendid selection of excellent stories, besides most thrilling instalments of the serial and the famous Confessions. The first story, the illustration of a thrilling incident in which will be found on page 154, is one of the most powerful stories which have yet appeared, and it would be well to send in your orders early or you will be unable to obtain copies, as there is sure to be an extra demand for the number. In the same issue will also be found the third offer of £20 in prizes in connection with the now well-known Pass-It-Along scheme.

CAN YOU DRAW A CAT?

For this week's competition I want to test the artistic skill of my readers. I therefore offer a handsome solid silver pencil-case to the reader who sends in the cleverest sketch of a cat, drawn solely with straight lines of which there must not be more than twenty. Drawings must be made on the back of postcards only, and should be addressed to the Competition Editor, *Short Stories*, Henrietta Street, W.C. There will be ten consolation prizes given to those whose efforts come next in order of merit and these will consist of rolled gold hearts and charms. In this case, the Editor's decision, of course, must be final. The competition will close after the first post on Tuesday morning, August 5th.

RESULT OF "WORD" COMPETITION.

I am now able to give you the result of the "Word" competition. The first award of a solid silver pencil-case goes to Mr. A. J. Lawford Jones, of 110 Westbourne Grove, W. His effort is as follows: Safeguard, Heaven, Our Royal Throne; Sadness Threatens Our Realm If Edward Sleep—thus using, as the initial letter of each word, the letters S, H, O, R, T, S, T, O, R, I, E, S. The ten Consolation prizes of rolled gold hearts and rolled gold charms go to the following: J. W. Henderson, 253 Stanton Street, Newcastle-on-Tyne; Winifred James, Castle View, St. Aubins, Jersey; R. G. Jones, 5 Afton Crescent, Paisley Road, Glasgow; Jenny Osborn, 15 Seaside Road, St Leonards; A. G. Seaward, 22 Daniel's Road, Nunhead; Miss D. Ryan, 21 Abbotts Road, East Ham; Lieutenant H. James, care of Captain Pritchard, Les Vaux, St. Heliers, Jersey; T. Tatlow, 136 Main Street, Bullwell, Nottingham; T. Allison, 18 Fleet Street, Gorton, Manchester; John F. Dell, 45 Brecknock Road, N.

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Another One.

The Heiress: "Yes, when I don't wish to accept certain men's attentions, and they ask where I live, I say in the suburbs." Mr. Selfsure: "Ha! ha! An excellent plan." (After a pause) "But where do you live, Miss Brown?" The Heiress: "In the suburbs, Mr. Selfsure."

Through Bitter Experience.

Little Girl (to her mamma): "What is a dead letter?" Mamma: "One that has been given to your father to post."

The Tramp Left.

Tramp: "Please, ma'am, I haven't a friend or relation in the world." Housekeeper: "Well, I'm glad there's no one to worry over you if you get bitten. Here, Carlo!"

An Unkind Remark.

Traveller: "You needn't make any extra preparations for my wife. The plainer the things are the better she likes them." Hotel-keeper: "Your wife seems passionately fond of you, sir!"

Very much Gone.

"You told me a falsehood last night, Ethel," said Ethel's father. "I asked you if Charlie Hicks had gone, and you said yes." "No, you didn't. You asked, 'Is that young man gone yet?' He was—awfully gone."

Future Warfare.

General (when bullet-proof uniforms become common): "What have you learnt?" Aide-de-Camp: "Victory will soon perch upon our banners. We have filled the enemy's clothes so full of lead that they can't move another step without undressing."

L'Enfant Terrible Again.

"These fish, my dear Mrs. Hendricks," remarked the minister, who was discussing a Sunday dinner with the family, "are deliciously fresh. I am enjoying them very much." "They ought to be fresh," volunteered Bobby, also enjoying them. "Pa caught 'em only this morning."

Compulsory Cleanliness.

Teacher: "Now I want all the children to look at Tommy's hands and observe how clean they are, and see if all of you cannot come to school with cleaner hands. Tommy, perhaps, will tell us how he keeps them so nice." Tommy: "Yes'm; ma makes me wash the breakfast things every morning."

Explained.

Struggling Dramatist: "I can't see how Littlewitt managed to get such a big price for that trashy play of his. They say that Miss Footlights paid him £2,000." First Nighter: "I presume you know that she is in love with her leading man?" "Yes." "Well, Littlewitt's play has twenty-five kisses in it."

An Unexpected Concession.

Stern Father: "What did Mr. Softly say when you informed him that I said he should kiss you just once each time he called? Angry, wasn't he?" Shy Daughter: "No; he seemed to be pleasantly surprised. You see, he had never offered to kiss me before, but he says your wishes shall be respected in the future."

His Definition.

Small Boy: "Uncle, what is a wiseacre?" Uncle (who is suffering from toothache): "A wiseacher? A wisdom tooth, my boy."

A Desirable Circle.

Quickson: "What exclusive and brilliant circle would you most like to enter?" May (demurely): "An engagement ring just now."

A Kind-hearted Little Girl.

"What are you going to do with your dolls, Sallie?" "I'm going to give them to a poor little girl I know, so's papa will buy me some new ones."

The Old Trouble.

Wife: "Dear me, you can never find a thing without asking me where it is. How did you get along before you were married?" "Things stayed where they were put then."

The Proper Way.

In a recent issue of a contemporary appeared a question entitled: "How should a trunk be packed?" The proper way to pack a trunk is to sit down in an easy chair and watch your wife do it.

Hoped He Might Improve.

Husband (vituperatively): "I was an idiot when I married you, Mary." Wife (quietly): "Yes, Tom, I knew you were. But what could I do? You seemed my only chance, and I thought then that you might improve a little with time."

Proof Positive.

Maudie's papa is night editor on a newspaper, a fact which Maudie apparently hasn't learnt; for when someone asked her a few days ago what her father did for a living, she replied: "I div it up. I fink he's a burglar, 'tause he's out all night."

An Unprofitable Task.

Mrs. Gadd: "You look tired, Mrs. Gabb. What is the matter?" Mrs. Gabb: "Tired! I'm nearly dead. I've sat at my bath-room window seven weeks on end, listening to the sounds in the parsonage next door, and I haven't heard a cross word yet."

Force of Habit.

Mrs. Cawker: "Don't you think it is very strange that Mrs. Stivetts hasn't returned or paid any attention to my call yet?" Mr. Cawker: "Not at all. It is merely the result of force of habit." Mrs. Cawker: "How is that?" Mr. Cawker: "She was a telephone girl before her marriage."

It Didn't Work.

Whiffers: "See here, Bliffers! You told me the way to win a girl was to devote myself to her mother." Bliffers: "Yes, sirree, that will do it every——" Whiffers: "Huh! I wanted to win Miss Beauti, and I took your advice, and devoted myself to Mrs. Beauti, and now the old lady, who is a widow, wants to marry me herself."

How She Felt.

Here is a story of a little girl who is very fond of walking with her father. One day he went further than usual, and she began to grow tired. She did her utmost to conceal the fact, lest it should make her father indisposed to take her with him on future occasions. At last her lagging steps betrayed her to her father's eye. Even then, however, she parried his questions, and could not be brought to admit her weariness, till he drew her into a trap. "Well, Lillie, if you don't feel tired, tell me just how you do feel." "Oh, I'm not *much* tired, papa," answered the diplomatic little girl; "but I feel as if I should like to take my legs off and carry 'em for a little while."

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THE SOMERSET SAPPHIRES.

A Tale of Some Stolen Gems.

Being the story of a strange claim made by the reigning Maharajah of Jutpore; Ghuzni Singh—now temporarily residing in this country—in connection with a certain celebrated and unique heirloom; for over five centuries in the possession of the family of the Somersets of Witmore Court, Bucks, and Cadogan Square, London, W. The tale is told by one Barte Yohe, Barrister-at-law, of the Middle Temple; the affianced husband of Esther Somerset, the present representative owner of the gems.

"Sir!" said the Maharajah, with Orientally regal emphasis; his naturally swarthy features darkening with visibly suppressed irritation. "I know my sapphires when I see them!—and—*these* are my sapphires!"

"But," said I, for at least the twentieth time during the interview. "Your Highness appears to altogether ignore the very pregnant fact, that the jewels in question, which you saw two nights since at Mrs. Somerset's house, have never once, except for cleaning purposes, been out of the actual possession of the family, any time during the past five hundred years."

The semi-Europeanised potentate merely shrugged his shoulders, ever so slightly, at this; a polite smile, exposing his really fine teeth, testifying to his utter incredulity with regard to my statement.

"You are," he at length said, taking up my card, and laboriously spelling out my name and dignities; which latter I had added in ink of set purpose, "You are a man of law—a Moulvie—a Pundit. You come to me, you say, on behalf of Mrs. Somerset—or her daughter; which is it? (here he smiled again, so provokingly, that I longed to personally teach him better manners) you come to me, I say, and seek to persuade me—me, a descendant of the great Rungeet!—that I claim as my own, the property of your friends. A lawyer, you!—and do this!—your law is not worth that!" and the now excited princelet snapped his fingers viciously.

Courtesy is, most of my friends admit, my particularly strong point, and this man—Indian Prince—a personal friend of royalty—was, I well knew, entitled to all deference and consideration at my hands. For once, however, I am afraid that in my zeal for those who had sent me on this errand, I so far forgot myself, as to put plain truth in the plainest possible way.

"My legal knowledge," I said, rising, "or the lack of it, is a matter which concerns myself only. With reference to that which has brought me here to-day, I simply have, in the first place, to repeat, that the Somerset sapphires, are known, as such, the world over; and, secondly, to declare that the present claim suggesting that they were—to put it bluntly—stolen; some time during the past six months, from the Royal Treasury in Jutpore; to mysteriously reappear to-day in the *quasi* possession of one of the first of English private families, is at once so palpably absurd and slanderous, that it hardly merits the being taken seriously.

"As, however, it has been seen fit to set the law in motion, I, as the friend and legal representative of the Somerset family, hereby give notice that I shall fight this preposterous claim at every point, and to the full issue, and——" here I fired my last, and, it must be confessed, absolutely random shot, "without scruple as to persons or consequences. I have the honour to wish your Highness a very good morning."

The inscrutable Oriental in attendance at the door, threw it wide; the while grinning till the whites of his eyes gleamed again; and I passed down the pile-carpeted staircase of the Alexandra Hotel, in as pretty a fighting temper, as it was possible for any decorous member of the British Bar to be.

When, a quarter-of-an-hour later I stood, with Esther, in the big bay of the drawing-room in Cadogan Square, relating my recent conversation with His Highness the Maharajah Ghuzni Singh of Jutpore, the whole thing seemed to me to be even more outrageously ridiculous than ever.

"The man must be mad!" I cried. "Why!—I can't understand any respectable lawyer taking the case up for him, big Indian pot though he is!"

"Doesn't it strike you as very strange, Barte," said my darling, as I finished my chronicle of the interview, "that the Maharajah should have instituted proceedings of this kind without word or warning at the moment of his fancied recognition of the gems? He at least might have done us that poor honour."

"Esther!—the whole affair is a puzzle! However, I have warned him, as your mother's representative, that I shall stick at nothing in order to demolish his idiotic claim, and to establish the Somerset right to the sapphires."

"But surely it is easy for us to show that we are the true and sole owners."

"There will not be the slightest difficulty in proving the Somerset ownership. The objectionable part of the whole thing is, that it means publicity (which, I think, your mother detests more than anything else in the world) a lot of trouble and worry, and a general upset just as you are all deep in the worries of the season."

"Yes, it is tiresome!" Esther said, "but if I could only bring myself to tell you something which, though it is but hazy in my mind as yet, is insensibly forcing itself upon me as the one feasible solution of the mystery, I have an idea that you would deem me to be as mad as is the Maharajah himself."

"Tell me!" I urged her. "What do you imagine is at the bottom of it all? Tell me!"

But she would not, and I had to be content with her promise to take me into her confidence later on.

A fortnight before, it should be here explained, the Maharajah of Jutpore, with a retinue of more than twenty-five persons landed in England, taking up his temporary abode at the Alexandra Hotel, Hyde Park Corner, the one place in London where the Oriental of high degree, finds himself truly at home.

The Maharajah himself was a fine specimen, physically, of our Indian dependent rulers—with the exceptional peculiarity too, of speaking English perfectly. His wardrobe, and jewels were alike magnificent; so that he bid fair to take the heart of Society by storm.

Balls, banquets, garden-parties; none of these functions were judged by their providers to be complete, without the presence of the handsome ruler of Jutpore.

I don't, as a rule, care much about the breed, myself. and declined to enthuse when my prospective mother-in-law exultantly informed me that she had secured the dusky visitor for her reception on May 10th.

All through the evening, I had noticed with disgust, the Maharajah's undisguised admiration for my Esther; admiration, however, I subsequently found, not so much for her, as for the family jewels she was wearing.

These consisted entirely of sapphires—the Somerset sapphires—and were valued at, I believe, one hundred-and-fifty thousand pounds.

A semi-tiara; an eight-rope necklet of stones, each the size of a hazel nut; wristlets, and armlets; and a corsage orna-

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ment that literally emitted fire at every movement of the wearer, made one almost to really realise King Solomon's glory; while it would certainly appeal to the barbaric side of the Maharajah's nature.

Then, on the next morning the bolt fell!

His Highness's English secretary called upon Mrs. Somerset, soon after mid-day, and, in the name of his master, laid formal claim to the wonderful sapphires.

The story he told was this.

For a hundred-and-fifty years or more, the glory of the Palace Treasury at Jutpore had been a large number of loose sapphires, of almost inestimable value.

Two years ago, the then Maharanee prevailed upon her husband—the father of the present ruler of Jutpore—to have the jewels re-cut and set, in European fashion, as tiara, necklet, bracelets and breast ornaments for her own use on State occasions.

This was done, the stones were sent to London in charge of a member of the Maharajah's household, and the ornaments were worn by the lady at more than one *dhurbah* or other Court function.

In December of last year, the Maharajah's Keeper of the Jewels reported the famous sapphires to be missing. Consternation reigned everywhere throughout the palace, from the throne itself, down to the humblest member of the royal household.

Life and death are, happily, not now in the power of the regenerate Indian Princes, or, possibly, heads would have fallen to satisfy the tiger-like craving for vengeance of Ghunzi Singh. The next best thing to be done was to employ English detective skill. Half-a-dozen of Scotland Yard's most capable men were retained, at fabulous fees, to proceed to Jutpore, and investigate.

They might just as well have remained at home, for, up to the eve of the Maharajah's departure for England, nothing in the shape of a clue to the whereabouts of the missing stones, or to the identity of the thief, or thieves was obtainable.

Matters remained in this state until the night of Mrs. Somerset's reception, when the Maharajah's attention being irresistibly drawn to the "Somerset Sapphires," as displayed on the fair form of Esther, he then and there determined in his own mind, that the jewels worn by the English girl, were his, and his only; and that he was perfectly justified in seeking to establish a claim for their restitution into his hands.

I did not, of course, anticipate that the legal proceedings would be of any length, as I was prepared with overwhelming evidence, to prove the possessive right of the Somerset family to the jewels.

Still it would be many months before the case of the Maharajah of Jutpore *v.* Somerset could, in the ordinary course of things legal, be reached; and, as the Indian prince had succeeded in obtaining of the High Court, an *interim* injunction, by virtue of which the jewels in dispute were placed in the temporary custody of an official trustee, my friend's disappointment and chagrin at the prospect of being unable to show forth the glory of the Somerset heirlooms during the remaining Society functions of the season, may be readily imagined.

Early on the morning of the fourth day after my interview with the Maharajah at the Alexandra Hotel, business, connected with the alteration of some trinket for Esther, took me to Bond Street. As it was this particular firm of jewellers there, who two years before, had cleaned and re-set the "Somerset sapphires," it was only natural that the manager, knowing me as a friend of the family, should touch me upon the topic of the Maharajah's claim.

"Of course we have heard, Mr. Yohe," he said, "of this absurd business, and, although I am not supposed to mention the matter, Mr. Walker, the senior partner, has already written to Mrs. Somerset, asking for an appointment, as he has something of importance to communicate respecting the jewels. This was late last night. Within the last half hour a reply has been received from Mrs. Somerset referring the firm to you."

"To me!—then I will see Mr. Walker at once!"

The old gentleman struck me as being nervously apprehensive of somebody, or something.

"I hardly know how to come to the point, Mr. Yohe," he said. "And yet, sooner or later, Mrs. Somerset *must* know the truth."

"The truth!—about this sapphire business?"

"Yes, sir!" replied the jeweller, with the air of a man about to make a plunge into icy-cold water, "the sapphire business; and it was only because we feared (both my partner and I) Mrs. Somerset's wrath, when she should come to know the rights of it, that we did not explain matters as soon as we heard of the Maharajah's claim."

"Yes—yes!" I said, excitedly, "go on!"

"Well, then, you know that two years ago, we had the Somerset sapphires for re-setting. But you do *not* know, that, coincidently, we had, as a commission from the then Maharajah of Jutpore, who died last summer, an order to cut, and set in European fashion some magnificent sapphires, which were at the same time consigned to us for that purpose.

Thinking no harm, as the jewels were to go out of the country, and because the arrangement would save valuable time, we persuaded ourselves to allow the stones to be set in replica of the Somerset sapphires; although we had no real peace until the Indian gems were safely on their way back to Jutpore."

"But," I interrupted him, "this puts a very different complexion upon matters; for, apart from His Highness's lack of good taste in making so peremptory a demand upon an English lady of wealth and position, and at such a time as the present, it accounts for much which otherwise would be inexplicable. But proceed, Mr. Walker."

"There is little else to say, sir, beyond that we look to you to make our peace with Mrs. Somerset."

"I think you may trust me to be able to effect that much," I said, "anyway——"

"Good gracious!" cried the jeweller, rushing from my side (we had by this strolled into the shop) to the street door and gazing wildly in the direction of Piccadilly.

Then he turned to the manager and myself. "Did you see a man—an Oriental, looking in at the window?"

We both declared we had not.

"It was Bhopi Lal, the late Maharajah's treasurer!—the man who brought me the loose stones; who remained here in London while they were being set; and who took them back again to Jutpore."

"Evidently," I said, "he is in the suite of the present Maharajah. I will find out; and if he is, I will ask you, Mr. Walker, to join me in a little scheme, which, if it be successful, will advantage both His Highness and my own friends."

"Anything we *can* do we shall be happy to do," replied the senior partner eagerly.

"Very good! Then you may expect to see me about this time to-morrow," I said. "In the meantime, not a word!"

As fast as a hansom could carry me, I flew to Cadogan Square.

"Esther, dear!" said I to her, when she came in answer to my imperative appeal, scribbled on a visiting card. "Esther!—what will you give me, if I bring this matter to a favourable conclusion in twenty-four hours?"

"Give you, Barte!—why, I'll—I'll marry you in a fortnight!"

"You will?—then I am already as good as a married man! for as sure, dear, as you and I are standing talking here, I am on the track of the Maharajah's sapphires!"

She didn't seem so greatly surprised as I considered she ought to be, so I ventured to emphasise that which I had already said, by adding that, as soon as I had left her, I should go to see the Maharajah again.

"Do you remember, Barte, my telling you a day or two ago, that I had an idea about this business? It was hazy then; it is perfectly clear now. I am quite ignorant as to what *you* know; but I greatly err if you do not put your finger on the thief of the Indian gems inside of two hours; and on a spot not a hundred miles from this house."

(*Concluded at foot of next page.*)

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The Great "PASS-IT-ALONG" Scheme.

FIRST AWARD £10.

SECOND AWARD £5.

THIRD AWARD £2.

Six awards of 10s. each.

AN ENTIRELY NEW FORM OF MONEY MAKING.

This novel and clever scheme will be continued in the next issue of SHORT STORIES. For the benefit of those who have not seen our previous announcements, we give below a rough idea of the scheme, so that they may be prepared for next week's offer.

Every person who buys a copy of "SHORT STORIES" will have the opportunity of entering for this scheme by first of all writing his or her name and address in a space which will be found at the foot of one of the pages, and then sending the copy of the paper to a friend whom the competitor thinks will be likely to sign *his* or *her* name in a space provided. This friend of yours will then post the copy to a friend of *his* or *hers*, and so your copy will go from one person to another for fourteen days, when you will find it returned to you. Then you simply send the copy to us, under the conditions which you will find next week, and if it contains more names than that sent by anyone else

You will get £10, and every person who has signed your papers will get £1 each.

Your whole expenses will be one stamp for sending a copy of *Short Stories* to your friend. Your friend, and his or her friends and friends pay the other postage. If, however, you don't want to send your own copy away, and you can't get a friend to give you his or her copy (readers, you will find, don't like parting with their copy of dear little *S. S.*), then why not get an extra copy of the next number, as thousands of other readers will do?

The copy will cost you one penny, and may bring you £10.

But don't leave it till Friday, when the next number is published, or you will find your newsagent is sold out. Just ask him to keep it by for you till you call on Friday for it.

Next week's issue, we may add, is to be our Holiday Number. A reproduction of the cover will be found on page 154, illustrating a thrilling incident in a story which will be found in that number.

"Esther!" I said, looking at her between the eyes with mock solemnity, "have you been reading 'Sherlock Holmes,' lately, with an eye to this?"

"No!" she answered me, laughing merrily, "I have just been putting two and two together, in the old-fashioned way, and I very much fancy that it is going to make four."

"I think so, too. But about this wedding-day of ours—is that to be my reward?"

She did not reply, but breaking away from me, ran out of the room, smiling back at me, however, as she tripped through the doorway.

* * * * *

"Mr. Yohe," said the Maharajah, "if what you say be correct, I certainly owe Mrs. and Miss Somerset, the humblest of apologies. You, too, for I fear that I was rude in my insistence of my claim, and belief."

"For myself," I said, "I remember nothing; while as for my friends, they will be too happy in the undisturbed possession of their property, to do anything but forgive anybody."

The Maharajah smiled, and rang for his treasurer.

Bhopi Lal, was, he was informed, out upon private business of his own.

"Send him to me, the moment he returns," was the order.

The door was scarcely shut when it was opened again by the same attendant, who announced that Bhopi Lal was at that moment ascending the stairs.

"Send him in here!" was the stern command

Silently, and with his head bowed upon his bosom, Bhopi Lal glided into the room, standing by the door, which closed behind him.

In his hand was a brown cow-hide hand-bag. At this the Maharajah glanced curiously.

The end came very quickly. A sharp demand from the prince for the bag to be handed to him; a pressure of the royal fingers on the spring fastening, and before us lay the missing sapphires, boxless; in splendid confusion.

The man made no defence. Calmly accepting the inevitable with Asiatic stoicism, in reply to his master's questions, he simply described how he had stolen the jewels; keeping them by him in a place of concealment until the expedition to England.

Once in London he hoped to be able to dispose of them, having been absent that very morning on a quest for a possible purchaser.

At my solicitation, the Maharajah consented to limit his treasurer's punishment to an immediate return to Jutpore, there to await his master's return. Of his ultimate fate, I am altogether ignorant.

* * * * *

Esther and I are to be married in a fortnight; the Maharajah not only consenting to grace the ceremony with his royal presence, but also to give the bride away.

His wedding-present has just arrived. It is a set of the finest diamonds in the Jutpore treasury. **Ralph Enderby.**

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The Thirty-first Day.

Telling of a Self-denial and a Recompense.

As he marked off another day on his calendar Wilfred Pearson smiled with a stoic satisfaction.

For three weeks now he had denied himself the exhilarating influence of Eleanor Duncan's society. He was indeed holding firmly to his promise—the promise he had given to his highest self on the day that Roy Hadley, all unconscious of the wound he was inflicting, impulsively confided to him his love for Eleanor.

Even while he marvelled at Hadley's blindness, Pearson had resolutely determined to be loyal to the friendship which, begun at college, had strengthened into a sturdy bond seemingly impossible of dissolution.

Roy Hadley should be given a fair chance, so far as Pearson's absence from the field was concerned. Thus the latter had resolved. Thus he had acted, even to the present day—the twenty-first day since he had made this promise.

Twenty-one days without a glimpse of her! They were twenty-one months—nay, years—instead of days.

Pearson began to wonder at his superb self-control and to congratulate himself upon the heroic strength of his invincible will. The fact that his unruly thoughts revelled in sweet imaginings did not as yet impress him as being inconsistent. So he steeped his soul in dreams of her and let delicious memories have their sway.

It was not until the twenty-fifth day that this spiritual indulgence of his love impressed him with a sense of its disloyalty. The startling accusation of an aggressive conscience awakened within him a fire of rebellion.

"I may chain my body," he protested, "but not my thoughts, my longings, the very impulses of my being! They belong to Eleanor. They will always belong to her—to crush them would be to crush life itself."

The twenty-sixth day, nevertheless, found him struggling against the dear imaginings which heretofore had fed his love and compensated in some degree for the sacrifice he was making. Unconsciously at first, then with direct intent, he strove to curb even the tender secret thoughts which, following the lead of his longing, winged their flight towards Eleanor by day and night.

Meanwhile he avoided too frequent meetings with Hadley, nor did he encourage further confidences. He at least need not force himself to endure another ordeal of that nature.

Then came the thirty-first day, when Pearson, looking heavily about him, wondered at the blank desolation that had settled upon the earth. For four entire days he had succeeded in keeping Eleanor out of his thoughts. But where now was the motive for living? Ambition, incentive, inspiration—all had left him. His heart was of lead, his soul of stone.

Again rebellion shook him. "It is because I have shut her out of my life! It is wrong—wrong! I love her—love her!"

The old influence swept upon him once more, magnetising his thoughts, thrilling his world with colour.

It was in the early afternoon that he strolled through the park in the vicinity of Eleanor's home. Of course he would not for the world break that sacred promise of his by venturing near her residence. He merely wished to breathe the pure air and witness the beautiful miracle of awakening Spring.

By no effort of will could he resist the onslaught of dear memories that attacked him as he paced the pebbly paths and let the magic of that exquisite day thrill through him. Eleanor, Eleanor! The image of her shone everywhere. Radiant blue sky, delicious air, budding green things, vast sweeps of velvety turfs, fragrance, sunshine—and Eleanor! It was all Eleanor!

He walked on and on, in a tumult of happiness. At a turn in the path a sudden glorious premonition throbbed through him. He looked up. The image of his brain resolved itself into the real image. Coming down the path towards him was the flesh and blood Eleanor, radiantly sweet in her dainty Spring attire.

There was no mistaking the fact that her eyes grew luminous at sight of him.

"You!" she cried. "Where have you been all this time? One whole month!"

Pearson murmured some unintelligible apology. He was aware of but one thing now—the intoxication of her actual presence.

"For shame, sir! I fear, after all, you are at heart a selfish recluse."

There was a bench near by and they unconsciously moved towards it and seated themselves. Pearson looked at her and tried to think of a fitting reply to her accusation. A soft haze hung palpitating before his eyes. Out of this haze her face smiled upon him.

"You have, of course, seen Hadley?" he questioned at length.

"Oh, yes—he comes very often. But you—you have not treated me as he has. You have forgotten me. Confess!"

Pearson looked sternly at the ground.

"Roy is a good fellow," he said; "a splendid fellow! You have no idea——"

He paused vaguely. There was a long silence.

"Why don't you speak for yourself, John?"

He started violently. Had his memory become vocal, or was it indeed Eleanor herself who had given utterance to the familiar quotation?

His gaze met hers and clung. In a flash he knew—knew without doubt!

"Dearest—dearest!"

* * * * * * *

After a while she tried to release her hand.

"Do you realise," she said demurely, "that we are sitting here on a bench in the park, making love in the most plebeian fashion, right in sight of everybody?"

"But no one is looking!" he protested. "No one is looking and—" he leant his head forward imploringly, "quick, Eleanor—just one!"

"Aren't you ashamed?" she panted, rosy and smiling, as she tried to readjust her hat.

"No, I am not!" he declared. "I should have some reward for thirty-one days of blank wretchedness. Oh, those awful days—each one a wilderness!"

"Each one?" she repeated. "Surely there is one exception!"

"Yes—just one," he replied, seizing her hand again, "and that is the thirty-first day."

Angela Morgan.

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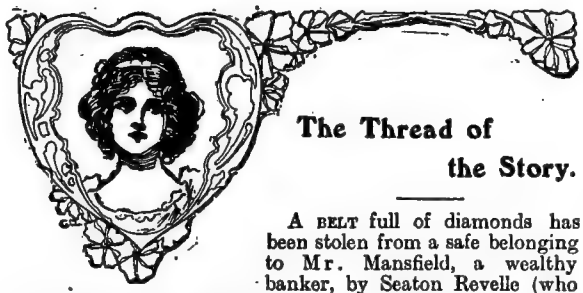
OUR THRILLING NEW SERIAL.

OUT OF GREAT TRIBULATION.

By HENRY FARMER.



The Thread of the Story.

A BELT full of diamonds has been stolen from a safe belonging to Mr. Mansfield, a wealthy banker, by Seaton Revelle (who is a friend of the banker's) and an accomplice named Benjamin Beard. Revelle accuses Alec Scarsdale, who is in love with Esther, Mr. Mansfield's daughter, of the crime, and he is sentenced to sixteen years' penal servitude.

Mr. Crump, late Chief-Inspector at Scotland Yard, feeling sure Scarsdale is innocent and Revelle is guilty, determines to prove the latter's guilt.

Mr. Mansfield as fully believes in Scarsdale's guilt as does Esther in his innocence, and his friendship for Revelle increases. Revelle constantly visits the banker's house in an endeavour to win Esther's love, but so far has not prospered at all. While talking with the girl one day, Mr. Mansfield's new maid, Vance, enters the room with a tray bearing cups of coffee. No sooner does she catch sight of Revelle than she drops the tray, and, pointing to Revelle, screams: "That—that man is *my* husband!" But Revelle, by sheer force of will, compels her to acknowledge her mistake.

At about this time Esther and Mr. Crump are walking together when they observe Vance about to throw herself into the reservoir. Crump stops her just in time—he and Esther taking her back to The Woodlands. Later on she is placed in the county asylum.

In the meanwhile Scarsdale manages to pass through several letters to Esther to which he receives replies full of hope and affection. On account of an assault upon a brutal warder, however, he is to be removed to Wrackam Convict Prison, an establishment famous for its hard discipline.

A charity concert is now announced, in which both Esther and Benny are billed to take part. Revelle, of course, is present; so also is Mr. Crump. It is while returning from this concert that Revelle proposes to Esther but is refused.

The great balloon incident now approaches. There is to be a grand *fête* in Lord Normanhurst's grounds, the chief and closing event being a balloon ascent by Mr. Seaton Revelle. Everything goes well till two horsemen arrive with the news that Vance has escaped from the asylum.

Acting upon Crump's advice they go straight to the reservoir, but fail to find the missing girl. The search is given up at nightfall. Shortly before nightfall Revelle makes his ascent. A storm, however, compels him to come down, the anchor touching ground on a neighbouring common just where Vance is waiting for him. The girl clings on to the anchor, and Revelle, quickly making a terrible resolve, throws out a number of sandbags, and the balloon again rises and continues its flight till Warham reservoir is reached. Just as the balloon is passing over the water Revelle cuts the anchor rope.

Vance's dead body is found next morning, Mr. Crump being informed of the discovery while walking with Esther

Mr. Crump examines the body and finds that a leg is broken, evidently by a fall. The coroner's jury return a verdict of "Found drowned." Mr. Crump next takes a walk on the common, and discovers some sand-bags.

Mr. Mansfield thinks it best that Esther shall leave Warham for a little holiday. It is while changing at Roxeter Junction *en route* for Gurlston Bay that Fate brings about a meeting between Esther and Alec, who is on his way to Wrackam. An impassioned scene takes place on the platform. Before many days are passed Seaton Revelle also journeys to Gurlston Bay, and it is while there that they hear of the plucky rescue from drowning of a warder at Wrackam Prison by Alec Scarsdale, and, subsequently of his rumoured escape from prison.

ALEC HAS ESCAPED.

"WHAT?" exclaimed Seaton Revelle sharply.

"That's what they're saying in the village, right enough; but I suppose we shall have to wait for the evening papers before we shall know whether it's true or not. 'Pon my word, after that plucky act of his, he deserves his freedom, though I don't suppose he will keep it for long!"

Revelle was biting his lips. The prospect of the man whom he had foully wronged being at large was not pleasant contemplation; but even if he had escaped, the chances were a hundred to one against his keeping his freedom. He was thinking rather of Esther, and the effect the news would have upon her. He knew nothing of her meeting with Scarsdale at Roxeter Junction. But the news would awaken memories and call her attention to the man whom he firmly believed she was beginning to forget.

A look of distress crossed Mr. Walters' face. He glanced back at the house, and up at a certain window that was closed. The little party gathered on the lawn was composed of men only.

"I hope," said the host in a low voice, "that you will all avoid making mention of this matter in the presence of Miss Mansfield. I trust that she will be well enough to come down some time to-day. Of course, you all know, and any reference to Scarsdale must only cause her pain. For her sake, I hope that this rumour is unfounded, and that there will be nothing about it in the evening paper. By the way, Mr. Revelle, it was you, of course, who caught him in the act!"

"Yes," answered Revelle slowly, "I caught him red-handed, and had the supreme satisfaction of bowling him over. But it was a horribly painful business. It shook my belief in mankind badly. After that, I felt almost as if no one was to be trusted. But it's a matter that I don't even care to talk about now. It's—it's too painful!"

The hint was taken. Conversation changed into another channel. When Revelle prepared to take his leave with his friend, Winter, Mr. Walters gave him a cordial invitation to come whenever it pleased him, and specifically invited him to dinner that evening.

"And," he added, "as soon as Miss Mansfield is herself again, we're going for two or three days' coasting cruise in the yacht. I should be delighted to see you and Winter on board."

"It's awfully good of you," said Revelle, "I shall be delighted!"

He was turning away when John Mansfield emerged from

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OUR THRILLING SERIAL. YOU CAN BEGIN TO-DAY.

the house. The banker greeted him with delight. He had heard of his arrival in the neighbourhood.

"Could I have a word with you privately?" said Revelle, after a few remarks had been interchanged.

"Certainly," said the banker, taking his arm.

They strolled away from the others.

"It's about that fellow, Scarsdale," said Revelle in a low voice. "I hope you won't think that I'm taking too much upon myself, Mr. Mansfield; but I've known you for some time now, and—er—well, don't you know, I think most awfully highly of Miss Mansfield, and can't bear the thought of her being pained, and—er—all that sort of thing, don't you know."

He was hesitating, and seemed obviously embarrassed. The banker had not been blind to the attention that Revelle had been paying his daughter. He was a charming fellow, evidently possessed of considerable means, and undoubtedly of good social position. John Mansfield would have been only too thankful to have welcomed him as his son-in-law. He would have given worlds to have known that the memory of Alec Scarsdale had been obliterated, and that the place that he had filled in Esther's heart had been taken by someone else.

"My dear fellow," he said, "don't hesitate to speak for one moment. What is it?"

"There's a rumour down in the village that Scarsdale's escaped—it hasn't been actually confirmed yet; but there'll probably be something about it in the evening paper. I thought that if you were forewarned, it might be possible to keep the news from Miss Mansfield!"

The banker's face darkened.

"The scoundrel!" he said harshly. "He is always coming back into her life, in some way or another! Thank you, Revelle, thank you. I shall do my best to keep this from her!"

They had strolled out of sight of the others. Both men were silent for a few moments. What followed did not take the banker by surprise. He was expecting it.

"It's awful presumption on my part, I know," said Revelle, speaking at last, with admirably assumed hesitation, "and I daresay that you can pretty well guess what I'm going to tell you—perhaps really I ought to have spoken before; but I had a sort of feeling that it would look as if I were trying to step into another fellow's shoes; but I—er—love your daughter. I learnt to love her when I thought that there was absolutely no chance for me. Then that wretched business happened at your place, and it put me in a false position. Perhaps even now I ought to have waited longer before speaking to you!"

John Mansfield held out his hand abruptly.

"My dear Revelle," he said with considerable emotion, "nothing would give me greater happiness—a load would be lifted off my mind—to know that you had won Esther's love, and had made her forget. I love my child far too much to bring any pressure to bear upon her; but you have my full consent, and I hope that I shall live to give you both my blessing; but I'm afraid that you have still a rival!"

Then the banker gave an account of what had happened at Roxeter Junction.

The muscles tightened round Revelle's mouth. A fierce, hard light burnt in his dark eyes. It had been the girl's money, in the first instance, that had attracted him; but now he desired her for herself. Jealousy gnawed savagely at his heart. He had been the instrument that had torn Alec Scarsdale from the woman he loved; he had sent him to prison; but he still stood in his path, and barred the way. Seaton Revelle realised now that he had been too quick in jumping at the conclusion that Esther was forgetting Alec Scarsdale. But the feeling of despair that swept over him was only momentary. His belief in himself was infinite. He would play the game all the more persistently. And if Esther's meeting with Alec Scarsdale represented a set-back, he had also gained an advantage. He was sure of her father's sympathy, and assistance up to a certain point.

"Well," he said, "I must be getting back to Winter. I don't know how to thank you, Mr. Mansfield. I shall be seeing you again. Walters has been good enough to ask me to dine to-night. Would you tell—er—Miss Mansfield how awfully grieved I was to hear that she had been so unwell? I hope that I shall see her this evening!"

"What a charming fellow your friend is," said Mr. Walters when, after Revelle's departure, he was joined by the banker. "I hope we shall see quite a lot of him whilst he is down here."

In her room, Esther was praying that Alec's act of heroism might result in a lessening of the awful stretch of years between him and freedom; but if not, she would wait for him.

"Till death!" she whispered, as she had whispered when her convict lover had clasped her in his arms.

Then she gave a little shiver. Again an indefinable feeling that some danger threatened had crept over her. She was conscious of a great sense of loneliness. Her father was with her; he was tenderness itself; but there was a barrier between them. Her mind had harked away to the kindly little man whom she had left behind at Warham. She felt that she wanted him near her. She would write to him at once, not to tell him of her loneliness—she must bear with that—but to let him know that the man whom she loathed beyond expression had arrived at Gurlston Bay!

There was a knock at the door. A moment later, a maid-servant entered with letters. One was from Crump. Esther laid aside the others, and opened it eagerly.

"My dear Miss Mansfield," it ran, "I am afraid, owing to postal arrangements, that this letter will only reach you after a certain person will have arrived at Gurlston Bay. I have only just been able to ascertain definitely his destination. I am exceedingly distressed. I had hoped that for a while, at least, you were going to have a little rest. I am indeed sorry! But I am going to ask you to bear with him. It is very essential that his suspicions should in no wise be aroused. I deeply regret that I cannot contrive to come to Gurlston Bay; but certain complications have arisen, and a splitting-up of parties, that compel me to divide my attentions between Warham and London. A certain person's motive in going to Gurlston Bay is, I am afraid, painfully obvious—it is to be near you! But you will, I know, be very brave. I do wish that I could be with you; but I feel that his motive is obvious, and that I ought to concentrate my attention on matters here, and the movements of a certain party now in London; but, should the unforeseen arise, should you need me, please send two telegrams, one to Warham, another to London. There my telegraphic address is 'Penworthy, Azaleas, London.' 'Come' is all that is necessary. I shall be with you at the earliest opportunity, should such a message reach me. The excuse for coming to Gurlston Bay will be my affair. It grieves me very much to say that matters are still more or less stationary; though the air is very highly charged with possibilities, and there is any amount of work to be done that I believe is destined ultimately to bear fruit. Once again let me preach the gospel of patience and hope. Let these be our colours, and let us nail them to the mast-head, and, though doubts and fears attack ever so fiercely, we will, with God's help, keep those colours flying! I have just come back from London, and am writing from Warham. Tom and Fred have just been to see me. The lads are working well, very well. I am proud of them. Have you been to the caves yet? If not you will find them full of romantic interest. You will doubtless find time to visit Reefe Castle, most interesting historically. I know the surrounding country very well. I wish that I could be with you. Ah, we should have some delightful rambles! The cliffs, too, are magnificent; but please be careful! They are not very safe. You won't venture too near the edge, will you? Altogether, please take great care of yourself. And now, my dear young lady, I must cease writing for the present. Tom and Fred asked me to send you their devoted respects. Will you please also accept mine, and will you be offended if I also add to that—my love?"

Esther felt better and happier after having read Crump's kindly, sympathetic letter. It had braced her up. She would play the game; there should be no faltering! And

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the knowledge that, if she needed him, he would come to her, brought comfort.

Crump had been very busy. Benny had left The Firs for the nonce, and had gone to London. It was very essential that his movements should be watched, and note taken with whom he associated. It was just possible that a clue might be obtained, in this way, as to the channel through which the stolen property had been disposed. Crump had shadowed him personally for a while, and then had intrusted the task to a certain former colleague, of his at Scotland Yard. Railton had been left in charge of The Firs, and Tom and Fred were frequent visitors there now—much to the little man's satisfaction.

And there was another matter that he was not neglecting—the mystery of Vance's death.

On the map that the little man had drawn of Aversham Common, another cross had been added.

Crump had found a third bag of ballast, and it was locked away with the others in the cupboard at Woodbine Cottage.

On his map Crump had drawn the points of the compass.

A line drawn from the cross that indicated where the first bag of ballast had been found, through the second and third crosses, and continued on, pointed directly to Warham reservoir.

Was this the course taken by the balloon?

* * * * *

"What time," said Revelle, "do the evening papers get here as a rule?"

He was sauntering with his friend along the brow of the white chalk cliffs that rose up precipitously from the sea. Their base was burrowed with caves. In some places the water immediately below was deep; in others, cruel-looking rocks jagged up like sharp teeth from the combing foam of the breakers.

"They come down with the six-three train!"

"H'm, well I think that I shall get round to the station."

Would it prove true, this rumour of Scarsdale's escape?

THE ESCAPE AND AFTER.

Scarsdale's act of heroism had been rewarded, not by a remission of any portion of his sentence, but by a remission of the remaining period of Special Orders. Though he still wore the black and drab dress, his leg-chains had been removed, and he had returned to the ordinary routine of prison life. He was no longer submitted to the frequent and monotonous searchings and espionage that had made life well-nigh intolerable. Moreover, his quarters in the prison had been changed. He was no longer in charge of Belton. He had also been shifted into another gang. So terrible had been the strain of Special Orders that he experienced a feeling almost akin to exhilaration when he passed out through the gates for the first time with his new associates.

St. Helen's Island, their destination, stood on the river Reedway, and was separated from the mainland by a small stream that was traversed by a wooden bridge, barricaded on either side. Along this bridge were posted at intervals armed sentries of the civil guard. Owing to its commanding position, the island was being fortified, the work being done by convict labour. Every precaution had been taken to prevent escape. Elevated sentry-boxes were posted round, and a wooden palisade, spiked and of a formidable height, inclosed the half-finished fortifications, and cut off the convicts at work upon them from the river.

The gang reached a small eminence where they were engaged in constructing a bastion. Scarsdale gazed hungrily

WHEN DOES DEAFNESS BECOME INCURABLE.

Although great advances have been made in the treatment of Deafness in the past twenty-five years, it has remained for the Drouet Institute to modify the almost universal opinion, that long-standing cases of Defective Hearing are incurable. In this respect, the report of thirty-six cases cured by the Drouet Method during the past month is truly surprising, as a large number of these patients had been afflicted by deafness of long duration, and had previously tried other special treatment without receiving definite benefit. Some of them, indeed, had been operated on. In contrast with these failures, the success of the Drouet Treatment is so great, that the Editor of the "Journal for the Deaf" has published details of these thirty-six cases in the form of a "Supplement."

Among these cases the following are of great interest:

At the age of 64 years, Mr. Horne presented for treatment, by the Drouet Institute, a case of long standing deafness accompanied by distressing noises in the ears, which had been pronounced incurable by his doctor. As Mr. Horne held the responsible position of Inspector for the British Homes Assurance Corporation Ltd., the deafness was a great drawback in his occupation, and it was therefore with much gratitude that he reported the successful result of the Drouet method:—

48 Penge Road, South Norwood, May 29th, 1902.

Dear Sir,—I am extremely pleased to inform you that I can now hear quite well. I was afraid at my age, viz., 64 years, perhaps I should not get my hearing restored, especially as my doctor informed me he thought I should be permanently deaf. I shall recommend your treatment to all I come in contact with in town and country. With kindest regards and many thanks.—I am, yours faithfully, J. HORNE.

In the case of Mr. S. T. Taylor, the Drouet Treatment restored the hearing after a well-known Yorkshire specialist failed. The deafness was so extreme a watch could not be heard ticking unless pressed closely against the ear. There was a continuous noise in the head, like the hissing of escaping steam, and also severe complications in the form of catarrh of the nose and throat. The completeness of the cure effected by the Drouet Treatment is shown by the following letter:—

High Pittington, Durham, May 30th, 1902.

Dear Sir,—I have much pleasure in reporting that my hearing is now as good as ever it was. I could not hear anyone speak, now I can hear all right. Thanking you for your kind attention.—Yours truly,

S. T. TAYLOR.

Those who are interested in reading a full description of the Drouet treatment for deafness and diseases of the ear, nose, and throat can obtain a free copy of the "Journal for the Deaf," with a "Supplement" containing detailed accounts of the cases cured during the past month by addressing the Secretary, Drouet Institute, Regent's Park Road, London, N.W. Each Journal is accompanied by a Patient's Report Form which enables applicants to receive full particulars for applying the treatment at home. Any advice by correspondence is absolutely free.

It is, however, always advisable, when possible, to be personally examined at the Drouet Institute, 72 Regent's Park Road, Primrose Hill, London, N.W., where consultations are held daily, except Sunday, from two to four in the afternoon. Special consultations may also be had at any time by previous arrangement. For all personal consultations a fee is charged.

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OUR THRILLING SERIAL. YOU CAN BEGIN TO-DAY.

at the broad river, the sunshine upon it, and many tan-sailed barges sailing lazily before the faint breeze. If only he were aboard one of them! If only he had his liberty!

Wrackam Prison was notorious for the strictness of its discipline, and a spirit of discontent had long been smouldering among the prisoners. Scarsdale had not been long at work before he gathered from certain muttered whisperings that something was in the air—something in the shape of a meditated mutiny. Presently the man working alongside, sidled a little nearer.

"Mate," he whispered, with motionless lips, "will you stand in along with us?"

"What do you mean?"

"Some of us can't stand things as they're going on no longer. We can't petition the 'Ome Secretary, and the visiting director won't listen to us. We're going on strike. It ain't no use doing so on the parade ground, 'cos we'll be surrounded by walls and screws; but out 'ere on the island it'll be different. When the signal's given, every man jack will chuck away 'is pick and refuse to do another stroke of work. If one cove was to do this, they'd march 'im off double-quick time to the punishment cells, but if something like a couple of hundred of us do it, it'll be a different matter. There ain't going to be no violence. It's only going to be a kind o' protest as will make them in authority think, and p'raps, by getting into the papers, do a bit of good that way."

Scarsdale had seen enough of the workings of Wrackam Prison to realise that there was a crying need for reform.

"There'll be no violence?"

"No! Honour bright!"

"Then I'll stand in with you!"

"The signal will be given this afternoon. I'm going to give it. I shall chuck down my pick, d'ye see. You keep your eye on me!"

When, that afternoon, the gang returned from the prison to the island, Scarsdale, as usual, glanced across the river. Though on the island itself the atmosphere was clear enough, a faint mist lay over the water. If the mist would only increase, and roll over the island—he glanced at the warders, then at the palisade. The hectic flush of a moment coloured his haggard cheek. He was free of his leg-chains now. It would be the opportunity for which he had so feverishly longed! Thoughts of Esther, a confused vision of Seaton Revelle, his smooth lying face close to hers, breathing some insinuation into her ears, flashed through his brain. For a moment he had forgotten all about the impending strike.

Crash!

The convict beside him had thrown down his pick. A warder promptly hurried up.

"Boys," shouted out the convict, "all of yer that are going to stand by me, knock off work!"

Someone else in the next gang took up the cry, and, barely thirty seconds later, some two hundred convicts had thrown down their tools.

Scarsdale had already flung down his pick. Warders' whistles were ringing shrilly out. Instinctively he glanced at the river. The mist had thickened and was beginning to roll towards the island.

The intention of the convicts who had organised the strike had been to avoid violence. But it is one thing to make plans, another to carry them out. The spark had fallen among gunpowder. One of the warders, a nervous man, had whipped out his revolver, and took a step towards one of the rebels. Quick as thought the convict snatched up his spade; whether the blow drew the fire, or the fire the blow, was never known. To those nearest the scene, they seemed simultaneous—the flash and the report of the revolver, and the swift downfalling of the spade that stretched the warder senseless on the ground.

Then followed a scene of the wildest confusion. Every fierce passion that had for so long been pent up, was let loose. Revolvers cracked out; cutlasses flashed. Convicts, warders, and civil guard were all mixed up in a tangled, struggling mass!

For a moment Scarsdale stood irresolute, gazing at the fierce fight. It could only end in one way—discipline and fire-arms must prevail. Detachments of the civil guard were pouring over the bridge on to the island.

Now or never!

He made a rush towards the tall, spiked palisade; clambered up it — the sentries had deserted their posts to hurry to the main scene of action — the spikes tore him, cut into his flesh; but he scarcely seemed to feel pain.

"Freedom, freedom, freedom!"

It was as if a thousand voices shouted the word into his ears.

Then the sharp crack of a rifle rang out!

One of the civil guard, hurrying towards the general *melée*, had seen Scarsdale as he clambered up the palisade. Over three hundred yards divided them. Dropping on to one knee, he had taken deliberate aim and fired. A hot, scorching pain seared Scarsdale's left shoulder. At the moment of firing he was astride the top of the stockade. He swayed and fell, but on the far side. The rifleman sprang to his feet, but, before he could rush forward, an infuriated convict, armed with a spade, flung himself upon him. One fierce blow of the spade smashed the rifle from his hand; and a moment

OUR COLOURED COVER FOR NEXT WEEK.

A thrilling incident in a powerful story which will be found in next Tuesday's SHORT STORIES.

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later the two men were locked together in a mad struggle, each trying to wrench the other off his feet.

Dazed and wounded though he was, Scarsdale was on his feet again in an instant. With breathless speed he covered the ground intervening between him and the river. He had not seen what had taken place immediately after the shot had been fired.

The haze that covered the water was already beginning to roll over the edge of the island. He passed into it, reached the water, and plunged in. He was a powerful swimmer, but his left shoulder was stiff and aching. The river was at least a mile in breadth; even if he reached the other side, he still wore the fatal convict-dress. The mist obscured his vision; even as he struck out, the thought flashed through his mind that he might be swimming in a circle, and would only land on the island that he was striving to leave behind.

He set his teeth. All the determination, all the endurance of his nature was now revealed. He could still hear the cries of the fighting convicts, the occasional crack of firearms. His heavy boots and the wounded shoulder were beginning to drag upon him. If only the mist would lift for a moment that he might see where he was! The water was choppy, and now and again a wave dashed down his throat, half-choking him. Every moment seemed to add to the leaden weight of his boots, and made it more difficult to keep his head above the surface.

For Esther's sake he would not give in! He would struggle on while he could move a limb, so long as breath remained in his body. Esther, Esther—her very memory seemed to buoy him up and give him fresh strength in his fight for freedom and life!

Suddenly, from out the mist, something dark loomed up before him. A gasp of joy escaped his lips. It was a boat—an empty boat that was lying at anchor in the stream. Twice he failed to drag himself out of the water into it. The third time he succeeded, and, bleeding, breathless and exhausted, sank down to the bottom of the boat. But he was up again a moment later. Every second was precious. The mist might rise before darkness came. He must get away, but to where? If he rowed across and reached the other side, his clothes would betray him. Perhaps, even now, the news of his escape was being telegraphed across the country. Every one, on land and water, would be on the watch for the escaped felon wearing the parti-coloured dress.

A hundred different plans crowded through his brain. The tide was running out; perhaps it would be best to drift out with it. The mouth of the Reedway adjoined the Thames. Reaching it, he might work his way up the Thames with the turn of the tide. By that time he would have the darkness in his favour. If he could only obtain a change of clothes!

Casting loose the anchor-chain, he put out the sculls. The tide was with him. Once he nearly fouled a sailing-barge, but though he heard the voices of those on board her, he could not see them, and they could not distinguish, close as they were, the felon's dress. Scarsdale thanked God for the haze that still cloaked the water.

When darkness came at last, he was still toiling at the sculls, though his shoulder had become almost unbearable; and his limbs ached, and his teeth were chattering with the cold. But hope and love still gave him strength. In after years, when he looked back upon that day and the night that followed, it all seemed to him like a dream.

It was quite dark when he reached the mouth of the Reedway, but the mist had risen. Away before him twinkled out the Nore light. Sheerness harbour lights shone out on his right. Once, before his convict days, he had spent a week on a friend's sailing cutter, cruising round the mouth of the Thames. He had roughly learnt the various points, and had sometimes taken the tiller. He thanked Heaven for his knowledge. The tide had turned. It was dead against him as he laboured round the bend that separates the Reedway from the Thames, but once round, it was in his favour, and swept the boat up into the Sea Reach, the broadest part of the Thames before it becomes merged in the sea.

A Mad Cyclist.

An inmate who recently escaped from a private asylum was recaptured whilst trying to ride a bicycle he had seized upon, up the side of a railway cutting. There was but little more foolishness in his attempt than in the daily attempts of scores of people who drive their systems to do impossibilities. Summer heat robs them of their appetite. Food becomes distasteful, and is avoided, yet despite the fact that they are taking less nourishment, they force their systems to do the same amount of work as before. Women are especially sufferers in this direction, and the result is debility, anæmia, "heat fag," and serious ailments peculiar to their sex. Chas. Forde's Bile Beans are a seasonable tonic. They create an appetite, give the weakened digestion power to deal with the food, stir up the sluggish liver, and stimulate it to normal action. They remove congestion which causes headache, and in all the common ailments of the home act like a charm. Your chemist will supply them at one and three halfpence or two and nine pence per box, or you may receive post free from the Bile Bean Manufacturing Co., 119 London Wall, E.C., for prices. They are not sugar coated, and may be carried loose in the waistcoat pocket. This is a point for business men to remember.

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OUR THRILLING SERIAL. YOU CAN BEGIN TO-DAY.

He was feeling now utterly spent. He was close in shore, and, with the exception of an occasional stroke to keep the boat straight, had ceased sculling, allowing the tide to work for him.

It would be something if only he could snatch an hour's rest; body and mind alike required it, for never once during the long hours that he had been sculling had he ceased to rack his brains on the question—how was he to obtain a change of clothes? Another thought that haunted him was the knowledge that the further up river he went, the greater was his risk of encountering the Thames police. His escape must be known by this time; the boat he had taken would be missed, and perhaps the river-police were already patrolling in search of him.

He had swept past several barges moored up to buoys, and anchored for the night. From some of them came the sound of voices; others seemed deserted. It was no time to stick at trifles. If he could come across an empty barge, he would not hesitate to board it. Somehow or other, he must obtain a suit of clothes. But he would snatch some rest first. A buoy loomed out of the darkness ahead. Catching hold as he passed, he made fast to it, and then flung himself down full length on the bottom of the boat.

Utterly dead-beat, he lay there like a log, too weary even to think. A few seconds later, he was in a dead sleep—a gracious sleep that gave him rest from pain, anxiety, and anguish.

He awoke with a start, fancying himself back again in his prison-cell, but the stars twinkling down upon him told him that he was beneath God's free Heaven. The rest had refreshed him. The pulse of hope was throbbing more strongly than ever. He sat up, but his shoulder had stiffened to such an extent that he could scarcely move his left arm. The blood had clotted, glueing his shirt to the wound. He cast loose, and once more took to the sculls. It was positive torture to row, and, with all his endurance, more than once a groan was wrung from his lips. He feverishly glanced at the sky; the stars were beginning to fade before the first grey light of dawn. And he was still wearing the hideous prison-dress. He ceased rowing, and looked round. In the distance he could just distinguish a couple of barges lying at anchor. He was getting desperate. If no sounds of life came from them, he would board one of them. The tide bore the boat towards them. Straining his eyes and ears, Scarsdale felt his heart leap into his mouth.

Across the deck of one barge stretched a line on which a number of clothes were hung up to dry.

He shipped his sculls. As the boat glided past, he grabbed the side of the barge. No sounds came from it. Quickly he made fast; then, with difficulty, owing to his shoulder, he drew himself on deck. A shirt, a rough blue flannel suit, a cap, a pair of socks, hung on the line; their owner had evidently had a tumble overboard.

It was the work of a moment to whip them off the line.

As he noiselessly lowered himself into the boat, he glanced at the name painted on the bows of the barge, "*The Lively Polly*, Rochester." If he came through all right, if ever the opportunity were granted him, he would make good the owner's loss.

Hope was stronger than ever now. Some distance along, he ran into a little creek. It was cruel work getting out of these convict clothes. The wound, furrowed across his shoulder by the rifleman's bullet, started to bleed afresh, and he almost fainted with pain as he tore away the shirt. Dressed in the other clothes, he had all the appearance of a riverside character. He rolled up the hideous parti-coloured dress into a bundle, weighted it with a couple of stones taken from the bank; then cast it into the water.

It sank with a hollow plunge. A great weight seemed to be lifted from his soul; he was free now from that hideous dress, with its arrow-brands, the tokens of infamy and degradation.

It was quite light when he shot out of the creek and made for the mid-stream; he was not afraid now of being recognised.

Esther—she was the keynote of his existence, of the almost superhuman strength and endurance that had buoyed him up.

But he was spent now, and tide and stream were against him. A mist rose up before his eyes. He sank forward over the sculls. He was vaguely conscious of a dark shadow, of a hoarse voice, of what seemed a faint crash; then all was a blank!

* * * * *

"That's better, mate, I thought you were never going to show signs of coming round!"

Scarsdale stared up blankly for a moment, then became conscious of a bronzed, bearded face staring down at him.

"Where am I?" he whispered. "What's happened?"

"You're aboard the *Mary Ann*. What came over you? You looked as if you were going to cross our bows right enough, and then you fell forward over your sculls. And we were on you before there was time to say Jack Robinson. Anyways, if your boat went to the bottom, we managed to haul you aboard. There now, get some more of this grog down your throat!" Everything returned to Scarsdale's mind with a rush.

"I didn't see me way to heaving-to and putting you ashore with the best of the tide under us, and seeing that I'm on a contract job where time counts; but I daresay you'll be all right here till to-morrow, when you'll be able to go ashore. Now you just keep quiet for a bit whilst I see about getting some sort of grub for you. We can talk of things after you've got something in your inside."

"Where," whispered Scarsdale, "are we bound for?"

"We've got a cargo of bricks aboard for Gurlston Bay!"

WHAT ESTHER SAW FROM GURLSTON PIER.

The rumour had proved correct. The evening paper had contained an account of Scarsdale's escape; but as yet Esther did not know. On the afternoon of the day on which she had learnt of Revelle's presence at Gurlston, she had left her room, and had spent some time in the garden; but when she heard of the invitation given by her host to Revelle, she pleaded her indisposition as an excuse for not appearing at dinner that evening. She told herself that it was only postponing the inevitable; but she was thankful for even a day's grace.

Esther breakfasted in her room on the following morning; but she was feeling much stronger. When she descended shortly before mid-day, she asked one of the servants for a morning paper.

"Please, miss," said the servant on her return, "I can't find any of the London papers. The gentlemen have gone out on the yacht this morning, and I think they must have taken them with them!"

The banker had wished to stay with his daughter, but Esther had insisted that he should go with the others. She had gathered from him that Revelle was to be one of the party. Another brief reprieve! Since his arrival at Gurlston she had not met him.

The village of Gurlston nestled in a sheltered bay, and was of sufficient importance as a seaside resort to boast a pier. In the old days, prior to the advent of the railway, most of the traffic had been water-borne, and even now barges and small coasting craft might be seen drawn up alongside the wooden jetty, hard by the pier, unlading their cargoes.

Esther's only companion at luncheon was her hostess. It was afterwards, while sitting alone in the garden, that a longing came over her to get a nearer glimpse of the sea.

Mrs. Walters was expecting a caller, and could not accompany her.

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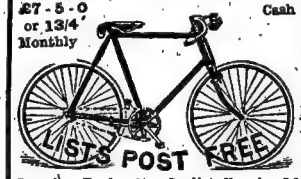

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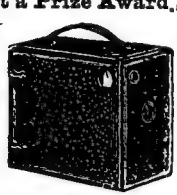

What You Have to Do. If you succeed in finding seven words, send them in at once. You thus win a Special Prize under the stated conditions and a cash prize, and you qualify for the Capital Prizes. The fuller lists can be sent later. Do not delay. Work out the words quick, and send two stamps for copy of **"British Fireside"** prospectus, conditions, postage, etc. We hope you will try for this, but we shall award the £1,000 in prizes anyway. Names and addresses of chief winners will be published. If you like, send 6d. and we will forward you the prospectus, conditions, award *and* a pretty Gift of Jewellery that will surprise and please you. Address—

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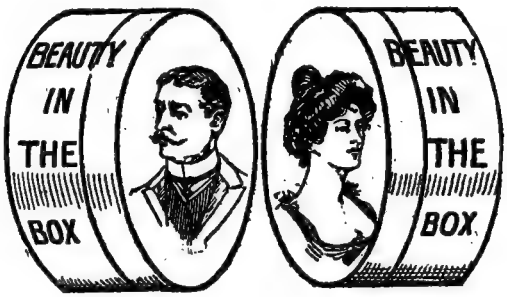

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Remember, David Macqueen's "Vegetine" Pills will not cure every disease under the sun, but they will purify your blood, cleanse the liver, clear and beautify your complexion, and strengthen and invigorate the whole physical system.

A FEW RECENT TESTIMONIALS.

Mr. H. R. Francis, Beaulieu House, Shandon Road; Clapham Park, S.W., writes (May 15th, 1902): "You will be pleased to hear that after taking your pills my complexion has become most beautiful and clear. Though I am not vain, I find it difficult to abstain from seeing myself in every mirror I come across. I trust you will be able to make your remedy known to all the thousands of sufferers from sallowness and skin blemishes."

Miss M. A. B., of Brixton Hill, S.W., writes (May 5th, 1902): "I have much pleasure in informing you that since I have begun to use David Macqueen's Pills, a great change has come over me. My health has greatly improved, and my complexion (so my friends tell me) is charming, thanks to your pills. I shall certainly recommend them to my friends. P.S.—You can make what use you like of this, with the exception of the full name and number in address."

Miss A. K., Railway Road, King's Lynn (June 28th, 1902), writes: "I am very pleased to say that after taking your pills my complexion and health have improved wondorfully."

Miss Bertha H., of Stroud Green, N., writes (May 8th, 1902): "Gentlemen, I write to thank you for the pills which have certainly proved most beneficial. I intend to recommend them to my friends."

Mr. A. Kay, Chadwell Heath, Essex, writes (May 2nd 1902): "I have been taking your pills for a short time only but really must say they have a wonderful effect on my health. They do not purge or act violently in any way, but gently and surely bring about a most healthy state. Apparent *outwardly* and inwardly felt."

Mrs. S. Wilson, St. Margaret's Terrace, Station Road Bognor (May 15th, 1902): "I enclose 1/1½ for your pills, which please forward to me as before. I think it only right to let you know that I am more than satisfied with the results, and think that every word in your advertisements is true; as my complexion and skin was a great annoyance to me, but after taking one box of your pills my skin is getting simply lovely which I can only attribute to your wonderful blood purifying pills. I feel, when out, bound to stop everyone I see with a bad skin and tell them of your great remedy."

Order Form.

To the David Macqueen Company,

12 Paternoster Row, London, E.C.

Please forward me a box of David Macqueen's "Vegetine" Pills, for which I forward the sum of.....

Name_____

Address_____

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"Are you quite sure that you feel strong enough; let me order you the carriage. Your father seemed to think that you ought not to go beyond the grounds to-day!"

"Oh, but I'm feeling ever so much better, and a little walk will do me good."

It was not a far cry down to the village. Esther made her way on to the pier. She was the only soul upon it. She sat herself down in a glass shelter. One or two craft were drawn up alongside the jetty, so close that she could read their names. For a while she stared out wistfully across the sea; then a flutter at her side called her attention to a paper that had been left behind by some previous occupant of the shelter. Picking it up, she opened it mechanically.

CONVICTS MUTINY AT WRACKAM PRISON.
ESCAPE OF A NOTORIOUS CRIMINAL.

Wrackam Prison, where Alec was! The blood rushed to her cheeks, then died away, leaving them bloodlessly white!

Feverishly she read through the account of the rising, how the civil guard had been compelled to fire upon the mutineers. So far there was no mention of Alec's name. Had he been among them? Had he been one of those wounded? She could scarcely bring herself to read on.

"It was during the confusion that No. 35 contrived to escape by climbing over the stockade and taking to the river. One of the civil guard fired at him, but was immediately overpowered by another prisoner, and prevented from giving the alarm. It was only after the rebellion had been quelled by the arrival of a strong force of soldiers from the barracks, that the identity of the missing man was established. He proved to be No. 35, the Alexander Scarsdale whose act of heroism in saving a warder from drowning was chronicled in our issue of yesterday. Search-parties were at once organised. At first it was thought that he must have perished in attempting to swim the river, but it now appears that a boat, anchored some little way below St. Helen's Island, is found to be missing. The prison officials are confident of his capture. Convict 35, at the time of his escape, was wearing the parti-coloured prison dress that denotes having assaulted an official."

A low cry of half-joy, half-agony, burst from Esther's lips. She clasped her hands together convulsively!

It was joy to think of him free; agony to think of him being hunted like some animal. Then her brain started to throb with a hundred tumultuous thoughts. They had fired upon him. Was he wounded? Where was he? Drifting out to sea in an open boat?

She clasped her pulsing forehead with her burning hands, and stared with great wild eyes across the bay.

A picturesque-looking barge, lying low in the water, moving lazily before the gentle breeze, was creeping round the headland into the bay!

"Oh, my love!" she wildly murmured. "Where are you—where are you? Oh, God! That I could be beside you now! Only to know!"

* * * * *

"But, Mr. Revelle," said Mrs. Walters, "I understood that you were going with the others on the yacht!"

Seaton Revelle had been ushered out on to the lawn where Mrs. Walters was taking tea with her visitor.

"Well, I had every intention of going; then I had a worrying letter from my solicitor this morning, about a little property that I've got up in the north, a fellow threatening me with a law-suit. It meant a long letter from me, so I gave up the idea!"

He glanced round casually.

"No, thank you, awfully good of you; but I won't take tea. How's Miss Mansfield? I hoped to see her!"

"Oh, she seems considerably better. In fact, she's gone down to the village. She wanted to be really near the sea. She said something about going on to the pier!"

A few moments later Revelle was sauntering down to the village.

Esther neither saw nor heard the well-built figure, spotless in "ducks" and blue serge, the yachting cap bearing the flag of a select club, that was strolling towards her.

She was staring in front of her, her eyes fixed unseeingly on a sailing barge that was being warped up alongside the jetty.

The name on the stern was distinctly visible:

Mary Ann!

(A further splendid instalment is published in the Holiday Number, ready Friday next, August 1st.)

A Very Poor Plan.

"HENRY is late again to-night," sobbed Mrs. Nubride, "and he knows well enough that I told him I wouldn't speak to him for a week if he didn't take to coming home earlier." "My dear child," said her mother, "you are very young yet, or you would never try that plan."

To Deceive the Baby.

MRS. JONES: "Why are you setting the alarm for half-past two? You surely don't want to get up at that time?" JONES: "No; I'd like to go to sleep at that time. When the baby hears that, he may think it's time for him to turn in."

Still Unlucky.

A YOUNG man who had been rejected thirteen times by a girl didn't stop there. Remembering that thirteen is an unlucky number, he proposed for the fourteenth time and was accepted. He is now prepared to believe that fourteen is a more unlucky number than thirteen.

Too Weak to Stain.

JINKS: "I called at your lodging-house to-day and saw the table nearly set for dinner, and I must say things looked very neat. I never saw a whiter tablecloth in my life." Blinks: "No, my landlady doesn't make her tea, coffee, or soups strong enough to stain."

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- - BY - -

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IN CONFIDENCE

By MADGE MORRIS.

[I shall be glad to answer, to the best of my ability, any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to me personally, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

Who Should Start Making It Up?

"PUZZLED" has had a quarrel with her lover, but is very proud, and thinks it against maidenly modesty for her to write first. Should she not wait and see whether the overtures will come from him?

* * * *

No, "PUZZLED." If you are conscious of having been foolish, and have in any way wronged him, you should yourself be the first to write to try and set things right again. He will not think any the less of you for it. Do not let pride—which in this case is certainly false and foolish—stand in your way if you are really fond of him.

❦❦❦

The Friend's Sweetheart.

"A VERY great friend of mine," writes "S. K.," "has a young lady whom I find I am getting more fond of every day, and now I feel I must have her, or I shall die. I cannot live without her. Please tell me how I can win her without offending my friend. She herself seems to like me very much."

* * * *

You should not make any advances at all. She is your friend's possession, and, for all you know, they are extremely fond of each other. To thrust yourself on her notice would be very dishonourable and unmanly. Be as nice as possible when you meet, and if, after all, her liking for you is greater than for your friend, she will in time reveal the fact. When that happens your course should be clear, but not while she is your friend's sweetheart.

❦❦❦

Should He Write?

"I AM in rather a poor position," writes "T. S." "and have frequently met a young lady of independent means and good education, who I am almost sure would like to make my acquaintance. She has no male friends, so I cannot get an introduction. She is about to leave the district. Should I write to her and ascertain whether I am right in thinking she would like to know me?"

* * * *

You say the girl is of independent means. I suppose, therefore, she is not living with her parents. Being a free agent, therefore, I do not see why you should not write to her as you suggest. It seems to me to be the most natural thing to do.

❦❦❦

Suspicious Ena.

"ENA" has for a long time known a certain man by sight, but having heard something against his personal character has never wished to meet him. Recently, however, she has been invited to a party, and after accepting the invitation has heard that the man in question will be there. She believes that if he is introduced to her he will make objectionable advances. Should she go to the party at all, and if so, how can she treat the undesirable man?

"ENA" should tell her hostess in confidence that she would rather not know the gentleman, and ask her to avoid, if possible, an introduction. If this cannot be done, it will be quite easy for her to convey to him by a very cool bow that, while she is compelled to know him, she desires no further acquaintance. Unless the man is devoid of pride and manners, he would scarcely attempt to embarrass you after such a definite snub.

❦❦❦

A Case for Restraint.

"PERCY H." has for long admired a girl he met once at a friend's house. But while they have met very often since, and had every opportunity of speaking, she has always avoided him. When she meets him out she gives the coldest of nods, and turns her eyes away.

* * * *

Evidently the girl does not want to know you, "PERCY H." That being the case, be man enough not to embarrass her. She probably is attached in another direction. Try and put yourself in her place, and imagine how you would feel if persons were continually seeking your acquaintance without any desire on your part to possess it. The girl has probably made up her mind that she could not care for you, and decided that rather than be compelled to inform you of the fact she will avoid any closer acquaintance, a decision which you should respect.

❦❦❦

Must Make His Choice.

"HOWARD" has been "keeping company" with a young lady in Wales, but since coming to London has met another girl whom he has got to like very much. How can he be honourable to both?

* * * *

He cannot. He must decide which of the two girls he is the more fond of, and be loyal to her. Attempts to maintain relations with two distinct girls invariably end in disaster, so, while there is yet time, "HOWARD" should take the path which is at once wise and honourable—that is, to select the girl whom he feels he could best love.

❦❦❦

The Intractable Mother.

"AUSTRAL" is employed in an office where there are several young ladies. One of them he is very fond of, and he knows that she likes him. But one day her mother discovered some rather compromising correspondence, and made the girl promise not to have anything more to do with "AUSTRAL," as she thought her too young for such things. If he got to know the mother, and confessed the whole truth to her, the latter lady would certainly remove her daughter from the office.

* * * *

I think "AUSTRAL" would do well, after all, to make a clean breast of the position to the mother. Otherwise there would be nothing else for him to do but either deceive her, and thereby involve the girl in trouble with her parent, as well as breach of her promise, or allow his acquaintance with her to drop. "AUSTRAL" should tell the mother that he is attached to her daughter, and that he wishes his actions to be thoroughly straightforward. If he is able to convince her of the honour of his intentions, and would promise that his conduct towards the girl would be always discreet, possibly the lady might be induced to waver in her decision. Whatever may be the consequences, I always think it is better for the dealings of a suitor with the parents of his sweetheart to be open and candid. Sooner or later, parents must recognise that they cannot always oppose the wishes of their children, even though it often takes years to convert them to doing so.

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